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We Take it With Us Wherever We Go: Maya-Q'anjob'al Youth Experiences of Migration and U.S. Schools

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We Take it With Us Wherever We Go: Maya-Q'anjob'al Youth Experiences of Migration and U.S. Schools

by

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Dedication

Esta tesis está dedicada a los jóvenes inmigrantes Maya-Q'anjob'ales que viven en el condado de Mason en el estado de Washington, y sus comunidades y familias en San Pedro Soloma, Guatemala, quienes en medio de tanta violencia y adversidades luchan todos los días para construir espacios seguros donde puedan vivir en paz. También dedico esta tesis a mi abuela, Maxine Fischel, quien falleció poco después de que regrese de Guatemala, mientras estaba trabajando en esta tesis. Abuela, gracias por todo que lo que usted me dio y enseñó. Me hace muchísima falta.

This thesis is dedicated to the Maya-Q'anjob'al immigrant youth living in Mason County, Washington, and their communities and families in San Pedro Soloma, Guatemala who fight every single day amid tremendous adversity and violence to build spaces for themselves where they can live in peace and safety. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my Grandmother, Maxine Fischel who passed away shortly after I arrived in Guatemala, while I was conducting research for this thesis. Grandma, thank you for everything you gave me and taught me. I will miss you dearly.

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I would like to sincerely thank everyone who put in their time and labor to participate in the creation of this thesis. In particular, I want to thank my parents Anne, John, and Lon for their unwavering support and guidance. My mother Anne spent countless hours encouraging me when I felt despondent, advising me when I felt lost and helping me through the writing process. My sister Elizabeth also spent many hours advising me, talking with me and helping me through the research and writing processes.

I also want to thank all of the educators (both professional and not) who have taught me and helped me grow. I want to thank Dr. Luis Urrieta, my graduate advisor, who taught the class where the idea for this thesis originated. Dr. Urrieta spent time with me, reviewed my work, and lent me his experience and expertise. He asked difficult questions of me and challenged me to think. Dr. De Lissovoy has been a consistent, supportive presence since I started at UT. I deeply value all that I have learned from both of them. Thank you to my friends and peers at UT. I want to thank others who have been instrumental to my education and growth over the years: Anthony, Ellen, Alice, Kim and Arleen. I also want to thank my *familia* in Venezuela who have taught me so much over many, many years.

Last, I want to extend a sincere thank you to the youth and their families who participated in the research for this thesis. Tuto, Edgar, Domingo, Jesus, Maria Jose, Marta, Fernando and Ricardo, I owe you a sincere debt of gratitude. You allowed me into your lives and into your homes. You gifted me with your knowledge and experience. I am forever grateful.

Abstract

We Take it With Us Wherever We Go: Maya-Q'anjob'al Youth Experiences of Migration and U.S. Schools

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Within the body of research devoted to immigrant Latinx students, limited research exists on Indigenous immigrant youth from Guatemala. This study investigates how Maya immigrant youth from Guatemala experience their Indigeneity in schools in the United States. Combining theoretical frameworks of Critical Latinx Indigeneities, prior research on Guatemala's colonial history and present neo-liberal context, and scholarship on Indigenous knowledge systems, I base my findings on a 4-month qualitative study of three Indigenous Maya immigrant youth from Guatemala living in the United States and five of their family members living in Guatemala. I analyze how Indigenous immigrant youth from Guatemala use their cultural funds of Indigenous knowledge to navigate, negotiate with and resist dominant deficit narratives about Indigenous Latinx students, their communities and their families.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Intro to Topic and Research Questions

From 2013-2018 I worked with Indigenous[1] migrant youth from Guatemala as the Student and Family Support Coordinator/ Homeless liaison of the Shelton School District in Washington State. Those experiences motivated me to engage in research to better understand how these youth experience school in the United States, and how schools can become more supportive of migrant Indigenous youth and responsive to their needs.

In working with migrant youths from Guatemala. I developed tremendous respect for the knowledge, experience and capacity they possess. I also had a first-person view of the overwhelming obstacles that many of these youth face both in schools and in the community. These included obstacles like: living undocumented in the United States, systemic discrimination both for being Latinx and for being Indigenous, exploitation by employers, landlords and other community members; constant fear of deportation, and economic pressure to support both themselves and their families in Guatemala. I frequently observed youth forced to pay exorbitant amounts of rent to live in the most decrepit housing in the community and struggle to come up with the money for the necessities of daily survival. In school, I frequently heard from youth that they were sitting in English-only classes with no linguistic support, and no ability to understand class instruction, their peers, or their classwork. Despite these obstacles, many of the youth I worked with overcame tremendous adversity and graduated. Others, feeling like

[1] I capitalize "Indigenous" throughout this thesis in solidarity with calls from within the field of Critical Indigenous Studies

they were wasting their time sitting in classrooms where they understood very little, succumbed to the urgent economic needs that faced them and opted to work full time.

This thesis explores the experiences of a group of Indigenous Guatemalan youth in U.S. schools. My research was guided by three central questions:

1.) How do Maya immigrant youth from Guatemala experience schooling in the US? What kinds of experiences do these youth have with teachers, other school staff, curriculum, and pedagogy in US schools?

2.) What are the transnational bonds that link Indigenous communities in Huehuetenango, Guatemala and Shelton, Washington? How do Indigenous migrant youth preserve and/ or adapt their values, cultures and identities as they navigate the education system in the United States?

3.) How do Indigenous migrant youth experience and negotiate deficit perspectives that they encounter in U.S. schools?

These questions guided my work over the course of the summer of 2019 as I engaged in this study.

Participants:

This study was designed to be conducted with former students of mine from when I worked in the Shelton School District. The criteria for my participants were that they be between the ages of 18-22 years old, that they be Indigenous from San Pedro Soloma in Huehuetenango, Guatemala and that they have at least some experience attending school in the United States. This study revolves around three primary youth participants living in

Mason County in Washington state: Tuto, Edgar and Domingo[2]. This study also includes five of their family members living in San Pedro Soloma, Guatemala:

Fernando (Edgar's Father),
Marta (Edgar's Mother)
Jesus (Tuto's Uncle)
Maria Jose (Tuto's Grandmother)
Ricardo (Domingo's pastor and mentor)

Tuto is a 22-year-old male from an *aldea*[3] on the outskirts of the town of San Pedro Soloma in the state of Huehuetenango, Guatemala. In his early childhood years, he grew up with his mother, sometimes his father and his paternal grandparents. Around the age of six, his mother left for the United States so she could work and support her family and Tuto moved in with his maternal grandparents. At the age of ten he started school in Guatemala. He attended school until he finished the sixth grade. Tuto reported that after the sixth grade, his family did not have enough money to keep sending him to school. In 2014, at the age of 16, he left his community in Guatemala to embark on the arduous trip to *el norte* to join his mother who lived in Washington. He enrolled in school in 2014, where I met him for the first time. He graduated with a high school diploma in 2018. Tuto is trilingual and speaks Maya-Q'anjob'al, Spanish and English.

Domingo is a 22-year-old male from a different *aldea* near San Pedro Soloma. Domingo grew up with his mother and grandmother. He reports that his father went back and forth between Guatemala and the U.S. during his early childhood, but was often uninvolved in Domingo's life. Domingo started school at seven years old in Guatemala.

[2] I use pseudonyms for everyone named in this thesis

[3] To protect the identities of my youth participants and their family members, I do not specifically name the *aldeas* where they are from. Tuto and Edgar are from the same *aldea*, Domingo is from a different *aldea*.

At 14, after completing the sixth grade, Domingo left school to work and support his family. Throughout his life in Guatemala, Domingo reports working in the *milpas* to support his family economically. Domingo left Guatemala and came to the US in 2014, at age 17. While in the US, he attended school and worked – mostly in landscaping. Domingo graduated from high school in 2018. He is currently a sophomore at a four-year institution of higher education in the Pacific Northwest. Domingo is also married, has a baby and continues to work through his landscaping business. Domingo is trilingual and speaks Q'anjob'al, Spanish and English. Domingo aspires to be a high school teacher for English Language Learners (ELLs).

Edgar is a 19-year-old male, also from the same *aldea* as Tuto and the middle of eight siblings. He grew up with his mother and father, though his father frequently spent extended amounts of time in the United States, Mexico or other parts of Guatemala to work and send money home to his family. Edgar started school at nine years old. He reports completing the fifth grade. At the age of 16 he left school to work and support his family. He reports that he suffered from medical conditions which interfered with his education. At the age of 17, in 2017, he left for the United States. His father and three brothers were already in Washington State and he wanted to join them. He enrolled in school and completed about a year of high school but then stopped attending because of an extremely difficult living situation, financial pressures and other family obligations. He currently lives in Washington State although he frequently travels to Oregon for work. He lived in a house with 18 other people, including various brothers and sisters, their

spouses, their children, his wife and his newborn baby. Edgar speaks Q'anjob'al and Spanish as his second language.

Maria Jose is Tuto's maternal grandmother. She is 65 years old. She lives in the *aldea* where Tuto was raised with her husband, Tuto's grandfather, her daughter, and four grandchildren for two of whom she is the primary caretaker. Maria Jose and her family live in a house being built by one of her sons, who lives in the United States who sends money periodically to Guatemala for the construction of the house. She works primarily at home, doing a variety of domestic jobs for which she is not compensated, but which are essential for the continuance of daily life. She primarily speaks Q'anjob'al and a limited amount of Spanish.

Jesus is Tuto's maternal uncle. He is 45 years old, married and has five children, two of whom are in the United States. He lives in the *aldea* in a house that he is building with his wife and three children. He does different kinds of work including working in his own *milpa,* as well as for family or other community members in their *milpas*. He also engages in communal responsibilities like the construction of the community school. He was formerly president of the community and continues to be very influential and active. Jesus has extensive experience in the United States. He speaks Q'anjob'al, Spanish and some English.

Marta and Fernando are Edgar's mother and father. Fernando is 47 and Marta is 44 years old. They live in the *aldea* in a house they built together with their son-in-law and three of their eight children. Marta has always lived in the *aldea*. Fernando returned to Guatemala in 2018 after many years in the United States because of a permanent injury

to his back that prevents him from doing heavy physical work. He told me that if he dies, he wants to die in his *aldea* near his wife. Fernando has extensive work experience. In the U.S. he worked in construction building houses, in agriculture, in the forestry industry and cutting wood for timber companies, among other jobs. In Guatemala he farms his own land, cares for his animals, cuts and gathers *leña* (firewood) for his family and works to build his house. He is also building a house for one of his sons who sends money from the U.S. for labor and construction materials. Fernando engages in community responsibilities like taking weekly rotations in community patrols to protect the community and in the construction of the community school. Marta also works incredibly hard. She cooks for her whole family, a task which includes chopping wood and building a fire multiple times per day. She cleans the house with her daughters, washes her household's clothes by hand, makes sure the house is stocked with water and takes a lead role in parenting her children. Marta also engages in community responsibilities like cooking and delivering food to other families and to work crews. Fernando Speaks Q'anjob'al, Spanish and limited English; Marta speaks Q'anjob'al and some Spanish.

Ricardo is Domingo's former caretaker and mentor. He is 55 years old and is a pastor at an evangelical church in an *aldea,* near San Pedro Soloma. Ricardo grew up in a neighboring *aldea*. He describes his childhood as challenging because of the extensive poverty his family experienced. He grew up having to work on the streets as a shoe shiner starting as a small child. As a young man in his 20's, he left for the United States to work. He described himself as having serious problems with alcoholism that began when he was a young man and continued for many years of his life. Converting to Christianity was

a turning point in Ricardo's life; he stopped drinking, developed a different set of priorities and became an evangelical pastor. He has been a pastor in his *aldea* for over twenty years. Because of his role as a pastor, he is accepted as a community leader, and often participates in making decisions at the community level.

Conceptual Framework

To understand the complex experiences of my youth participants, it is important to develop an understanding of the current violence experienced by Indigenous communities in Guatemala and situate that experience within the colonial history of the country. It's also important to note that my participants are racialized through different colonialities; As they cross borders, they move through areas where colonization happens in different ways, and so are racialized differently depending on whether they are in Guatemala, Mexico or the United States. At the same time, Indigenous youth possess rich forms of knowledge that they take with them as they migrate and utilize in complex ways. To understand their experiences, I have combined frameworks developed by Batz (2017), by Blackwell, Boj Lopez and Urrieta (2017), and by Urrieta (2013).

Throughout this thesis, I refer to concepts such as settler colonialism and neo-liberal capitalism in order to discuss how these systems impact my youth participants and their communities both in the U.S. and in Guatemala. Settler colonialism refers to a historically rooted but ongoing process of displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples across the America's by non-Indigenous settlers. Settler colonialism creates racial logics which operate differently across borders in accordance with specific colonial histories (Blackwell et al., 2017). These settler-colonial racial logics, as applied to

Indigenous peoples in the United States for example, are marked by a logic of elimination, as Native American tribes are subjected to a host of blood quantum requirements for official tribal recognition (Wolfe, 2006). Blood quantum exists in opposition to the racial logic of the "one drop" rule which assured the continued enslavement and oppression of Black people in the U.S. by categorizing anyone with "any amount of African ancestry, no matter how remote, and regardless of phenotypical appearance," as Black (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). These racial logics are historically rooted, but hold important implications for the present. Settler colonialism also exists in Latin America, although it is less commonly recognized. Speed (2017)) argues that a failure to acknowledge and identify how settler colonialism has functioned and continues to function in Latin America contributes to the narrative of *mestizaje* – a settler logic in its own right -- which incorrectly posits a racial homogeneity among Latinx people, and contributes to the erasure of Indigenous peoples and their ongoing struggles against displacement and dispossession by settlers. As Speed (2017) states, "by failing to address settler colonialism as settler, they accept the basic premise that the settler has settled, and is now from here, rather than acknowledging that there is a state of ongoing occupation, in Latin America as elsewhere in the hemisphere" (p. 786).

Neoliberalism is another important concept that I refer to frequently in this thesis. By neoliberalism, I refer to the most recent iteration of capitalism. Neoliberalism is multi-faceted and refers to a project which is not only political and economic, but also social and cultural. Politically and economically, neoliberalism advocates for the removal of barriers for the movement of capital, and an ultra-reliance on the free market (Harvey,

2007). Neoliberal policies push economic and environmental deregulation, and cuts to social spending and austerity policies (Harvey, 2007). In Latin America, neoliberalism has frequently manifested as an economic and political imposition on the part of first world powers like the United States and multi-national corporations and has opened borders for multi-national corporations to exploit conditions in the global south. In the U.S., as in Latin America, neoliberalism is characterized by austerity programs, cuts to social spending and deregulation of the economy and the environment (De Lissovoy, 2015; Harvey, 2007).

As a social and cultural project, neoliberalism redefines notions of personhood and citizenship, rationalizing social problems with structural roots through the guise of personal responsibility (De Lissovoy, 2015; Harvey, 2007). Under this doctrine, systemic inequality is moralized and explained through the doctrine of personal choice. This doctrine serves to justify an economic and political concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few (Harvey, 2007). Neoliberalism explains social, economic and racial inequality in these terms: the wealthy and powerful earned their wealth and power by making good decisions and working hard; the poor and dispossessed are poor because they failed to make good decisions and didn't work hard enough. Poverty and racial inequality are moral, personal failings rather than a product of structural violence produced by systemic inequities. In this way, neoliberalism attempts to push a sense of hyper-individuality, dissolving personal interconnection and social solidarity and atomizing individuals as separate, disconnected entities (De Lissovoy, 2015).

Batz (2017) offers an important account of colonialism as both a historical and an ongoing process in the national context of Guatemala. Batz' analysis is critical when thinking about the modern current political, economic and social contexts that cause migration from Guatemala to the United States. Batz' analysis of colonialism as not simply a historical phenomenon, but an ongoing process is particularly useful for understanding the ongoing dislocation and diaspora of Indigenous people from Guatemala to the United States.

Blackwell et al.'s (2017) theory of Critical Latinx Indigeneities (CLI) encourages us to consider the concept of multiple latinidades, complicating the notion of Latino/a/x as a singular race or ethnicity, and challenging the idea that Indigenous people stop being Indigenous once they migrate. Instead, CLI encourages us to consider how Indigenous Latinx migrants often face multiple forms of violence, including violence and discrimination from other non-Indigenous Latinx demographic groups. Critical Latinx Indigeneities encourages us to view hybrid forms of violence that develop when multiple colonial frameworks combine.

Urrieta (2013) documents the rich values and forms of cultural knowledge that are passed down between generations in many Indigenous Latinx communities. He calls these *familia* and *comunidad* based *saberes*. In designing my research, Urrieta's framework has been essential for conceptualizing how Indigenous youth utilize the knowledge and values they received in their home communities in order to resist the forms of violence and exclusion they encounter in the United States.

Literature Review

Maya immigrant youth form an ever increasing percentage of Latinx students in U.S. schools (Barrillas Chón, 2019; López & Irizarry, 2019). These youths are frequently forced to leave their communities of origin to escape conditions of poverty and violence related to historical but ongoing processes of dispossession and genocide of Indigenous people (Batz, 2017; Esquit, 2010; Sanford, 2003). At the same time, Mayas in Guatemala exercise important forms of power and resilience (Batz, 2018; Bitar et al., 2008; England, 2003; Esquit, 1998, 2009, 2010) in the face of ongoing assaults on their communities. While migrating, Maya youth face complex landscapes of power and state-sanctioned violence (De León, 2015; Jonas & Rodríguez, 2015).

Once in U.S. schools, Maya immigrant youth also face obstacles. Deficit narratives, or "the idea that students, particularly of low-SES [socio-economic status] and of color, fail in school because they and their families have internal defects, or deficits, that thwart the learning process" (Valencia & Black, 2002, p. 83) are commonly deployed against Latinx students in the field of education. Deficit narratives about Latinx students originate in the evolution of biological racism – or the myth that Latinx students are biologically inferior -- to cultural racism, or the idea that Latinx cultures are inferior and don't value education (Valencia & Black, 2002).

Valencia and Black explore the evolution of this way of thinking as it is deployed against Mexican American students specifically. But it is common for racially and ethnically diverse groups of Latinx students to be essentialized as "Mexican." While Valencia and Black's (2002) research focuses on the evolution of deficit narratives as

they have commonly been applied to Mexican American students, my research suggests that deficit narratives are often applied to Indigenous Latinx students as well. As other authors have noted, many Indigenous Latinx students are grouped in as "Latino" or "Hispanic" (Alberto, 2017; Barrillas Chón, 2019; Blackwell et al., 2017; Casanova, 2019; López & Irizarry, 2019; L. J. P. Pentón Herrera, 2019), and these denominations are frequently used synonymously to mean *mestizo.* This colludes with the myth that Indigenous peoples no longer exist in the Americas and erases the racial and ethnic diversity within Latinx demographics.

As the work of many Latinx scholars (especially Indigenous Latinx scholars) shows, Indigenous Latinx youth who grew up in indigenous communities possess important forms of knowledge and education (Barillas Chón, 2019; López & Irizarry, 2019; L. J. P. Pentón Herrera, 2019; Urrieta, 2013) relating to their cultural, familial and community capital (Yosso, 2005), funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), and Indigenous ways of knowing and learning (Battiste, 2005; Rogoff, 2014; Simpson, 2017; Urrieta, 2013) which are frequently unrecognized, ignored and un-valued in U.S. schools.

Urrieta (2013)) speaks to this in "Familia and Comunidad-Based Saberes: Learning in an Indigenous Heritage Community." He shows the rich *saberes* about *familia* and *comunidad* that Indigenous heritage communities in Michoacán, Mexico pass down from generation to generation. Urrieta (2013) writes (p. 321):

> Saberes are acquired as life-long processes and responsibilities that model competent and respectful behavior (Cajete 1994) and form part of familias' and comunidades' funds of knowledge (González et al.2005) and cultural wealth (Yosso 2005).

Where Valencia and Black focus on a lack of educational attainment among Mexican Americans and attribute it to systemic discrimination and economic obstacles, Urrieta shows that Indigenous Latinx communities hold unique and valuable forms of knowledge that are not recognized or valued in public schools in the U.S. Urrieta's work is important because it contributes to ways in which scholars and staff in U.S. schools can view Indigenous Latinx youth along with their communities, families and cultures through asset, rather than deficit, based frameworks. Throughout my thesis, I will build on the concept of *saberes* to highlight the assets of my youth participants. I will show how their cultural and social strengths were misrecognized or ignored by their U.S. schools. And I will cite or offer suggestions for how the schools might adapt their curriculum to recognize and support their Indigenous immigrant students.

The concept of diaspora is important to understanding the experiences of my youth participants. Maya youth and families in the United States, as a diasporic community, face significant obstacles and challenges. They also exercise important forms of agency and survivance (Casanova, 2019). Multiple scholars have utilized Blackwell et al.'s (2017) Critical Latinx Indigeneities (CLI) to provide a framework for thinking about the experiences and identities of Indigenous Latinx migrants living in diaspora. For example, CLI "rejects the idea that Indigenous people cease to be Indigenous when they migrate (leave the pueblo) or when they cross the political borders of modern nation states" (Urrieta Jr et al., 2019, p. 3). This refutes common notions of assimilation, which demand that immigrants abandon their cultures, languages and unique cultural identities. At the same time, CLI also refutes essentialist notions of Indigeneity as static and

unchanging (Batz, 2014; Blackwell et al., 2017; Urrieta Jr et al., 2019). Instead, it illuminates the different political, economic, historical and social landscapes that Maya migrants encounter as they migrate. In fact, as many Maya immigrant communities encounter racism, exclusion and violence, they adapt and work both to maintain but also to transform their cultural and linguistic practices (Batz, 2014; Boj Lopez, 2017, 2017; Casanova, 2019; Ek, 2009; Morales et al., 2019; Vásquez, 2019). CLI helps illuminate the different landscapes of power that Maya migrants encounter and how power operates in their lives. For example: language, which is an important component of many Maya peoples' cultural identity, often serves as a proxy for race in both Guatemala and the United States (Barillas Chón, 2019; Bitar et al., 2008; England, 2003; Falbo & De Baessa, 2006). The ability to speak English or Spanish, and the accent with which one might speak either of these languages is often a determinant of the jobs, opportunities, and pay that is available to Maya immigrants (Barillas Chón, 2019).

In schools, Maya migrant youth often face unique barriers. Classroom instruction is almost universally in English or Spanish, never in their Indigenous first languages. Many teachers are ill equipped to deal with the unique academic needs of many Maya immigrant youth who frequently are students with limited and interrupted formal education (SLIFE) (L. J. P. Pentón Herrera, 2019). In addition, Maya immigrant youth may possess knowledge and learning styles that are not valued or recognized by their schools (L. J. P. Pentón Herrera, 2019). As such, many Maya immigrant students may experience social isolation from their non-Indigenous peers, exclusion or an inability to access their education. Barillas Chón (2010) discusses educational practices that can be

experienced as welcoming or unwelcoming for Indigenous immigrant youth and shows how these practices impact youths' feelings of belonging and acceptance in school. Additionally, when schools do not distinguish Indigenous Latinx' youth from their non-Indigenous peers, but essentialize them as "Latino" or "Hispanic," they are often failing to recognize and address the unique needs that Indigenous youth have of their schools (López & Irizarry, 2019) and the unique strengths they bring to their U.S. education.

Methodology

This study was conducted in Washington State and in Huehuetenango, Guatemala. I first spent two months engaging in ethnographic research with my three youth participants in Washington. For the second phase of my research, I went to San Pedro Soloma in Huehuetenango, where I spent six weeks engaging in ethnographic research with my youth participants' families. Finally, for the third phase of my research, I spent a week in Washington state debriefing with my youth participants.

In pursuing this study, I was guided by methodologies of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). Throughout this thesis, I attempted to, create "life drawings" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 5) to "capture the complexity and aesthetic of human experience" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 5). Portraiture rejects the notion of an ethnographer as an impartial observer and instead advocates for a relationship between researcher and participants that is participatory and collaborative. A central aspect of portraiture is that research and analysis be based on notions of solidarity with marginalized communities. As such, my research was not guided by the parameters of scientific objectivity; I attempted to position myself and my research to be in solidarity

with my participants. As a white man working with Indigenous communities, solidarity means that I must acknowledge that we live in a world profoundly impacted by white supremacy, capitalism and settler colonialism. It demands that I recognize my positionality, and the power afforded me by my social, cultural, economic location. And it requires that I inform my own practices by looking at the positionalities of my participants, who were all Indigenous, migrant youth from Guatemala and who experience oppression on multiple axes. In such a world, I recognize that any claim to neutrality would by default be a support for the status-quo of power relations. As Paulo Freire famously says, "Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral" (Freire, 1984, p. 524).

Throughout the study, I grappled with serious questions about how to respectfully engage in ethnographic research as a white, male researcher from the U.S., working with Indigenous migrant youth from Guatemala. These questions are not easy to address. There is a long and ugly history of white researchers exploiting Indigenous peoples through research (Smith, 2013). Many researchers come from prestigious universities in the US, spend time in Indigenous communities that are not their own, extract knowledge and learning from those communities, and then leave. They publish their research, reaping the benefits, prestige and credit that comes with it. Their research circulates in academia, provoking thought, and debate, but the communities that were researched never benefit. There is no accountability between researcher and the communities that researcher studied. Those researchers often times never return to those communities, but get to claim expertise because of their work.

It was important for me to be conscious of this dynamic between white researchers and Indigenous communities and to try, as much as possible, to create a different dynamic. Throughout my time with my participants, I actively looked for ways to give back – to be more reciprocal – and to be guided by notions of solidarity. As a former advocate and social worker in the Shelton, Washington community, I had knowledge of community resources and a knowledge of how to navigate through government bureaucracies. I offered that knowledge to my participants; I accompanied two of my participants to court and helped them navigate through complicated legal processes. I assisted in one of my students' searches to find an immigration lawyer to represent him in his application for asylum. With another of my participants, I helped him write a personal, legal statement asking for an exemption so that he would not have to return to Guatemala to apply for US residency.

In Guatemala, where I stayed with my participant's families, I contributed to household costs like food and transportation. I tried to contribute significantly more than what I consumed. I brought gifts from my participants and their families living in Washington to their families in Guatemala. I recorded video messages and delivered those messages to their family members. I also brought gifts of my own for the families I would be staying with. Conversely, on returning to Washington from Guatemala, I brought video messages and gifts from their family members to my youth participants.

One request that was made of me by one of my youth participants' family members in Guatemala was to organize a fundraiser for the community. He said this idea was first raised by several other community members. I agreed to do so.

As much as I tried to give back, it is also important to highlight the many ways in which my youth participants made this study possible. Indeed, this work would not have been possible without their help and guidance. Their support came in many forms. One of my youth participants lent me a car for 3-4 weeks. All of my youth participants contacted their families and communities in Guatemala and opened the doors for me to be there. The communities where I spent time in Huehuetenango do not let strangers in. It was possible for me to be there because my youth participants vouched for me, and coordinated my stay. When I arrived in Guatemala City, Maria Jose and Jesus, Tuto's grandmother and uncle, were waiting for me at the airport. They made the 10-hour drive from Huehuetenango to Guatemala City, picked me up and drove with me back to their community. I also learned that my youth participants and their families sent money from the U.S. to Guatemala in order for me to stay with their families. Tuto sent money so his grandmother could buy a bed for me and so that his uncle could take a day off work and spend time with me. Edgar sent money to his family so they could take me to see a waterfall, and Domingo sent money to his sister to make me a special meal. I am indescribably grateful for their generosity, hospitality and concern. But I also worry that my presence was a burden for them and their families. My hope is that their financial contributions were in part, motivated by a recognition of the importance of the work that we engaged in together. I feel indebted to them, and I hope that this work can ease that debt by contributing to the struggle for social and economic justice – so that our communities and our schools can become truly welcoming and responsive places for Indigenous migrant students.

In Washington, I spent between 10-15 hours a week engaging in participant observation with my participants. Most of my participants work 5-6 days a week. That's what the majority of my time with my participants consisted of. I worked landscaping with some, and I accompanied one of my participants in his job as a security guard at an abandoned factory at night. I also went to soccer games, church, religious youth groups, baptisms, and court for both criminal proceedings and immigration related proceedings. I conducted one semi-structured interview with each of my participants lasting between one and a half to two and a half hours each. In these interviews, I asked questions about youth's lives in Guatemala, their journey north, their experiences on first arriving to the United States and their current lives in the U.S.

In Guatemala, I spent six weeks in San Pedro Soloma: 4 weeks in Tuto and Edgar's *aldea*, and 2 weeks in Domingo's *aldea*. I stayed with the families of my youth participants for two weeks each. I worked with my participants' families, engaged in daily household activities and chores, went to church and religious services, and went to *cumpleaños, quinceañeras, velorios* and other events. I also went to community meetings, and participated in communal responsibilities like the building of a community school. I conducted four semi-structured interviews with members of my youth participants' families, lasting one to two hours each. Throughout my fieldwork, I took fieldnotes and wrote reflections. In my observations, I tried to be cognizant of the dynamics of power that pervade U.S. society. I was looking for ways that my youth participants interacted and negotiated with power. I also looked for *saberes* (Urrieta, 2013), or the cultural knowledge, skills and values that are passed down to future

generations in family and community contexts. While in Guatemala, I used emerging themes from interviews and observations I conducted with my youth participants in the US to guide my observations in their communities of origin. In particular, all of my youth participants identified "respect" and "hard-work" as *saberes* learned from their families and communities that they treasured and tried to uphold. I looked for examples of this during my observations with my youth participants' family members in Guatemala.

On returning to Washington, I spent six days debriefing with my youth participants. I talked to them about my time with their families, and about what I had seen and learned. I talked to them about their family members, many of whom they had not seen in years. I also showed them recorded video messages that their family members sent, and showed them pictures of their families and of their communities.

After concluding fieldwork, I transcribed all interviews and typed all field notes and written reflections. I started the coding process. I first reviewed all of my data to get a general sense for common or recurring themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I developed categories for coding and color coded across my interview transcripts and field-notes/ reflections. Then I created a spreadsheet where I included the specific quotes and observations as evidence to support the themes that emerged from the coding process.

Positionality Statement

I am interested in research that is positioned in solidarity with communities that experience marginalization and oppression. I hope any research I engage in will be done in collaboration with the communities being researched, and that the results will benefit

those communities. As part of this process, it's important to me to continually interrogate my own positionality in relationship to the Indigenous communities with which I seek to collaborate. I am a white male, from a middle class Russian Jewish family.

My positionality affected my research constantly in big and small ways. Engaging in this research project, I was faced with daily questions about how my positionality was impacting my interactions with my participants. I also had to constantly check in with myself about how my positionality affected my assumptions, gave power to my requests and language and all of the other little and big ways that the dynamics of power influence our relationships and interactions.

In Washington, I noticed how my positionality impacted my interactions with my youth participants. In one of the days I engaged in participant observation with Edgar, I accompanied him to his landscaping job. At first it was a very awkward experience for everyone. Edgar's boss was a Q'anjoba'l speaking man from San Pedro Soloma. He was very suspicious of me and why I wanted to join his work crew. He reluctantly allowed me to join his crew for the day. The first stop of the day was to a business where the crew was responsible for cleaning up weeds, moss that was growing on the concrete, and trimming trees around the edge of the property. The three-man team got out of the pick-up truck, and without a word picked up the tools they would need and went to work. Eddie picked up a pair of gloves, a shears, a rake and some other tools. Eddie's coworker put on a leaf blower and started blowing; Eddie's boss went to work in another part of the building. It was clear that everyone knew what their responsibilities were and were focused on their work.

I was caught in a dilemma. I wanted to participate; I certainly didn't want to stand around watching them work while I did nothing. I felt awkward and I felt like a burden watching other people work. But I didn't want to be a burden by asking them to teach me the work. I tried to take initiative by doing something I assumed would be helpful. I was quickly interrupted by Edgar who told me he would do what I was doing. I realized that part of the dynamic of the situation was that Edgar knew me as an authority figure who worked in an office in a school he attended. In his eyes, I wasn't someone who did this kind of work. We talked about this later, at the end of the day. He said it was strange for him to see me trying to do the same kind of work that he does. He also said it made him feel sad because the work he does is hard, physically demanding and pays little. My positionality as a white man whom he knew as someone who worked in schools impacted the work that I could or could not do in his eyes. This directly relates to Barillas Chón's (2019) work on how power operates through labor. It was clear he wasn't sure what 'box' to put me in. After this experience, Edgar seemed to grow more comfortable seeing me do physical work. For both of us, engaging in this research necessitated an evolution of our relationship. For him it meant changing his assumptions about the work I could or could not do as a white man whom he knew as a professional working in schools.

In Guatemala, I faced similar questions though much more intensified. I very quickly came to realize how complex it was for me to stay in the households of my participants' families. Again, my most important goal was not to be a burden for the families I was with. I also quickly realized that the most important goal for the families was to be good hosts. They went above and beyond the conventions of hospitality.

Predicting the comforts I was accustomed to in the U.S., they purchased a salt shaker and a glass mug especially for me. They insisted on heating water for me every morning and every evening so I could wash my face and hands and brush my teeth with warm water. They insisted on washing my clothes – over my objections. For a long time, they also refused to allow me to participate in day-to-day work. In their eyes, as a white man from the U.S., working in the *milpa* or collecting *leña* was not something I should do (Barillas Chón, 2019).

In one particular moment, I became frustrated because I felt that I was not allowed to do anything. Being sure not to visibly express my frustration, I gently asked Don Fernando if I could go to work with him. He appeared flustered. He said, "you can't do the kind of work we do." I responded, asking, "Why not? I don't know how to do the work you do, but I would love to learn. That's part of the reason why I'm here." The next day he took me to chop up a tree that had fallen in the middle of a neighbor's *milpa.* In this instance, I believe that Don Fernando was reluctant to take me to work because my positionality put me in a category that does not do the kind of work that he does. At the same time, my direct request to participate in his work carried weight and power because of my positionality. If he had concerns about my being a burden for him at work, I don't believe he would have voiced them because of the dynamics of power affecting our relationship. Was it all right for me to make a direct request to go to work with him? Should I have waited for him to define the parameters of our relationship, and to identify the access into his life I should be allowed? Was I abusing the privilege and power I held in the situation to be a burden for Don Fernando at his work? Part of what I have learned

through this project is that these are not questions that can be definitively answered; they must be asked again and again. In this thesis I will continue to reflect on how my positionality affected my interactions and relationships with my participants, and the data I gathered, as well as the conclusions I may draw from my thesis research.

Chapter Two: Historical Context and Schooling in San Pedro Soloma

Context: The Four Invasions and Survival amid Colonial and Neoliberal Violence

To understand the experiences of participants in this study, it is important to contextualize the socio-economic and political histories that have impacted conditions for Indigenous communities in Guatemala. The modern history of Indigenous Mayas in Guatemala has been dominated by a persistent, colonial struggle for land and resources (Batz, 2017; Esquit, 1998, 2009, 2010; Galeano, 1997). This struggle began with the Spanish conquest of the Americas and continues to this day. Indigenous people in Guatemala continue to resist the theft of their land and resources, the exploitation of their labor, the destruction of their traditional subsistence economies, and the violence deployed by the state and multi-national corporations (Batz, 2017). This colonial history deeply impacts my youth participants and their families. In this chapter, I will explore how an ongoing colonial history has shaped conditions of violence and poverty in the Guatemalan communities that my youth participants are from, and how that history has contributed to their experiences growing up.

Batz (2017) traces the history of colonialism in Guatemala referring to four colonial periods in Guatemalan history, the four invasions. He cites the first invasion as the violent arrival of the Spanish in 1524 which was characterized by forced displacement, violent conquest and forceful conversion to Christianity. The formation of the colonial Guatemalan nation did not happen through happenstance, but was built intentionally through violence to reproduce colonial relationships of power (Galeano, 1997). A racial caste system was created to justify the concentration of political and

economic power in the hands of a Ladino (European) oligarchy[4] (Esquit, 2010). This hierarchy gave Ladinos access to citizenship within the colonial nation-state, and the privileges of political and economic power, while denying power and the rights of citizenship to Indigenous people (Esquit, 2010). This racial hierarchy continues to structure social relationships between Mayas, Ladinos, and the state in Guatemala to this day. Batz (2017) refers to the second invasion as the period between the mid 1800's to the mid 1900's when the Guatemalan state sought to "modernize" the nation in order to attract foreign investment in the production of agricultural commodities, primarily coffee. This second invasion was characterized by the continued theft of Native land and the oftentimes blatant enslavement of Indigenous people (Batz, 2017). The third invasion encompasses the period of civil war, between 1960-1996, defined by a scorched-earth military campaign of genocide against rural Maya communities (Batz, 2017; Sanford, 2003). The fourth invasion refers to the continued theft of Indigenous land and resources in a neo-liberal partnership between the Guatemalan state, multi-national corporations and first world powers like the United States and Europe (Batz, 2017). Together, the four invasions paint a picture of a colonial process that is not simply a piece of the past, but a history that is ongoing. My Indigenous youth participants, their families, and the rural communities they come from are heavily impacted by this history and by the ongoing process of colonization.

[4] The meaning of "Ladino" has since expanded to include non-Indigenous people in Guatemala

Speaking to his family's history during the second invasion, Don Fernando, the father of one of my youth participants (Edgar) recalled watching his father work as a slave for the Ladino ruling elite:

> La historia de mi papá fue muy triste porque ellos trabajaron mucho y sufrieron mucho aquí en este lugar… toda una carretera que viene de Huehue, el pues fue a trabajar allí e iban a pie. De aquí hasta Huehue. A vender trigo, a pie iban cargando 50 o 65 libras de trigo. Para ir a venderlo allá. Y luchó su vida para darnos de comer con mi mamá…Y ellos lo mandaron obligatoriamente, hay que ir a trabajar en la carretera. Y los que mandaban pues para arreglar la carretera pues si no obedece uno pues a veces te tiraban la piedra. Hasta hay mucha gente que murió allí. Ellos sufrieron mucho… mi papá trabajó el tiempo cuando un gobierno que fue presidente en Guatemala que era el nombre de Ubico. Entonces él era muy malo. Trataba muy mal a la gente. Entonces para él pues éramos esclavos de ellos. Y bueno aquí en Soloma, mi papá pues me estuvo contando esta historia cuando ya estaba yo grande, de 13 o 14 años. Nos estábamos hablando entre nosotros y mis hermanos… La gente Indígena sufrieron mucho.
>
> The history of my father is very sad because he worked a lot and he suffered so much in this place… a whole trip from Huehue, he went to work there and he went on foot. From here to Huehue to sell wheat. He would go on foot carrying 50 to 65 pounds of wheat to go sell it there. And he struggled to make a living to give us food with my mother… They made him, he had to go work on the road. Those that sent him to build the road, well, if he didn't obey, sometimes they would throw rocks at you. There were even people that died there. They suffered a lot… My dad worked during a time when a man named Ubico was president of Guatemala. He was a very bad man. He treated people very bad. For him, we were slaves. Here in Soloma, my dad told us these stories when I was older, around 13 or 14 years old. He told myself and my brothers… Indigenous people suffered so much.

Don Fernando describes the oral histories passed down to him by his father which remember how Indigenous people were treated by Ubico, one of the Ladino dictators who ruled Guatemala from 1931-1944, with support from the United States. Don Fernando recounted watching his father suffer so that his family could eat. He talked about his

family's experiences being enslaved, and forced to work building roads from Soloma to Huehuetenango, a journey that presently takes about three and a half hours to travel by car. He described the physical violence used to coerce his father to work. During my interview with Don Fernando, he explicitly mentioned Ladinos as those responsible for the exploitation and enslavement of his father. Don Fernando's oral histories of his family serve as an important testament to the violence that Indigenous people experienced during the second invasion. His oral histories of the way his family was treated by local Ladino elites shows how colonial relationships of power and the racial caste system impacted my participants and their families.

In 1954, after a 10-year experiment in democracy and political reforms in which a growing movement of Indigenous people and their urban allies organized to demand land redistribution and ownership, the country's Ladino elite partnered with the CIA to overthrow democratically elected president Jacobo Arbenz in a military coup d'état (Grandin, 2000). Six years later, the country erupted in civil war as the *Ejercito Guerrilla de los Pobres* or Guerilla Army of the Poor (EGP) took up arms against military rule (Sanford, 2003). From 1960-1996, the military waged a brutal campaign of state terror and genocide against the Indigenous majority of Guatemala (Sanford, 2003). Though the war went through several phases, the most significant violence happened from the late 1970's through the 1980's during the rule, first, of general Fernando Lucas Garcia and later, during the infamous rule of General Efrain Rios Montt (Sanford, 2003).

In this period, under the guise of combatting "communist guerrillas," the military massacred hundreds of rural Maya villages killing hundreds of thousands of people and

displacing millions more. *"Quitarle el agua al pez"* or removing the water from the fish became an intentional military strategy to justify genocide. In this metaphor, the fish were the guerrillas who, the military claimed, were sustained and supported by rural Maya communities – the water. Under this military strategy, all Indigenous people became the enemy, whose extermination was justified through the purported goal of combating guerrilla insurgents (Sanford, 2003).

In reality, massacres and assassinations were a general response to any kind of community organization on the part of rural Mayan communities. While 'combatting guerillas' was used as the official justification for the Guatemalan military's violence, Sanford (2003) documents massacres and assassinations that followed community literacy campaigns, the organization and creation of cooperatives and other community projects. Guatemala received overt support from the United States during this campaign of genocide. As Sanford (2003) shows, the US Department of State was not only aware of the Guatemalan military's genocide of Indigenous people, they justified it ideologically as a part of the war against communism. Throughout the long civil war, the Guatemalan military received aid from the US in the form of money, weapons; military training in counter-insurgency techniques at the School of the Americas and intelligence. This aid enabled the Guatemalan military campaign of state-sponsored terror against Indigenous Guatemalans.

According to the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), one of the two official truth commissions tasked with uncovering evidence of genocide during the war, by 1996, 626 villages were massacred by the army, and over 200,000 people were killed

(Sanford, 2003). Additionally, 1.5 million people were displaced and 150,000 people were forced to seek refuge in Mexico. The CEH also concluded that 93% of massacres and of displacement were caused by the state and that 83% of those killed or displaced were Maya (Sanford, 2003). The exhumations of clandestine mass graves and the process of post-civil war peace-making continues to this day.

It is difficult to overstate the absolute brutality of the campaign of state terror waged against the Maya during this period. What is clear from the *testimonios* of survivors like Rigoberta Menchú (2010), is that the goal of the military was not simply to exterminate the Maya, it was to do so in the most violent, brutal fashion imaginable. The authors of the genocide wanted to instill a lasting terror in survivors that would preclude any possibility for political organizing or action (Sanford, 2003). The war also brought to light the truth that the Maya's commitments to their Indigenous cultures, identities, languages and ways of life were considered a threat to the colonial notion of a cohesive Guatemalan state (French, 2010). Torture, rape and slavery were commonplace tactics used by the military during the war. Many Maya were forced into Nazi-style concentration camps and subjected to "re-education," in which they were brutalized for speaking their native languages. Others were forced by the military to participate in civil patrols where they were made to participate in atrocities against their neighbors (Sanford, 2003). No amount of descriptive writing can do justice to the impact of the civil war. The violence and brutality experienced by rural Maya was unimaginable, and the legacy and trauma of the war continues to this day in the collective memory of survivors, former combatants, and Guatemala's Indigenous people.

A full historical account of the civil war goes beyond the scope of this thesis; however, the war is an important piece in understanding a major part of the colonial history of violence of the communities that my youth participants come from. Several of my participants' family members talked about their experiences during the civil war. Their communities were severely impacted by the civil war. In an interview, Jesus, the uncle of another youth participant (Tuto) said:

> Fue el año 85 cuando estuvo la guerrilla. Allí si pasó… hubo muchas cosas. Mis padres también estaban amenazados. O sea, allí en ese tiempo si iban a poner a toda la comunidad esclavizados otra vez… en ese tiempo mataron a mucha gente. Mataron hasta aquí también en nuestra comunidad mataron mucha gente. Aquí también estaba organizada grupos de gente, como guerrillas… Hubo muchas dificultades, muchos problemas.
>
> It was the year '85 when the guerrillas were here. That's when it happened… a lot happened. My parents were threatened. In other words, in that time, they were going to make the whole community slaves again. In that time, they killed a lot of people. They killed people here in our community. There were organized groups here, like guerrillas… there was a lot of difficulties, a lot of problems.

Jesus spoke to the violence experienced by the community during the civil war saying, "they killed a lot of people." At the same time, Jesus made reference to the community's historical experience with violence when he said "they were going to make the whole community slaves again." For Jesus, the violence experienced by the community during the civil war was not an isolated experience but part of a consistent, historical pattern of violence rooted in the colonial relationships between Indigenous Mayas and the Guatemalan State.

In his interview, Don Fernando also spoke to his memories of that time period:

> Yo fui pa' Los Estados Unidos, la primera vez llegué allí. Fue como en el… '89. Y aquí, en nuestra aldea como de los '85 -- el '85 fue el tiempo *más peor* para nosotros. Estaba la guerra. Aquí paso la guerrilla. Había combates con los soldados… Y nos daba miedo salir afuera. No puedo luchar la vida. Estábamos bien cerrados. No salíamos… Ya pone a las tres, uno tiene que estar encerrado uno en la casa. Si sale uno más tarde pa fuera, a ver dónde te encuentran, que le van y te matan. En cualquier día… Hay gente pues por pocas cosas te odian… Te pone así en peligro pues que esta gente no es buena. "Mátenlo y ya." Y así hicieron a mi hermano. Lo mataron aquí en parque central de Soloma. Lo mataron. En ese tiempo del 85. En el 85, le cortaron la nariz, le cortaron la cabeza, cortaron los pies también.
>
> I went to the United States for the first time. It was the year… '89. And here in our town, around that year in '85. '85 was the *worst* time for us. There was war. There were guerrillas here. There were battles with soldiers. And we were scared to go outside. I couldn't struggle to have a life. We were kept inside. We didn't go out… Around three, you had to be inside the house. If you were out later, who knows where you would be found – they would go and kill you. It could happen any day… There are people that for very little hate you… they put you in danger because they are not good people. "kill him and be done." That's what they did to my brother. They killed him here in the central park of Soloma. They killed him in that time period in '85. In '85, they cut off his nose, they cut off his head, they cut off his feet also."

Don Fernando remembered the war as a time of violence when "we were scared to go outside." He recalled the brutal murder and dismemberment of his brother. Don Fernando's statement, "I couldn't struggle to live," shows how the violence of the war prevented him from working, providing for his family, and engaging in the myriad daily activities necessary for survival. Don Fernando also cites the violence and total disruption of daily life caused by the civil war as the reason he first left Guatemala for the United States in 1989. This is important in considering the history of Guatemalan migration to the US. As Don Fernando's interview shows, there is a long history of diaspora from

Guatemala to the United States that predates current stages of migration (Jonas & Rodríguez, 2015).

In her exhaustive ethnographic study of exhumations of mass clandestine graves in Guatemala following the 1996 peace accords, Sanford (2003) speaks to the economic cost the civil war had on Indigenous survivors:

> Throughout my fieldwork in Guatemala, whenever I have asked massacre survivors about their losses and their needs, I have found that *Vivienda* (housing) is always one of the main worries. While to many outsiders, peasant lifestyles may appear to be uniformly poor, for peasants, the size of a house and the materials of its construction have great implications for the comfort and health of a family… prior to the massacres, houses were much larger than today… the majority of families had a principal home of residence as well as another home under construction… prior to the massacre, every household had livestock and domestic animals, furniture, several changes of clothing for each family member (p. 80).

Sanford's (2003) study shows how the massacres and destruction by the military during the civil war impacted survivors economically. Her quote illuminates how the scorched earth campaign employed by the Guatemalan military destroyed people's homes, corn fields, possessions and livestock. In my research in San Pedro Soloma, I heard from everyone I talked to that the economic situation was very difficult. "No hay trabajos, no hay dinero," or "there are no jobs, there is no money," was something I heard repeated nearly every day, especially as an explanation for why people emigrate to the United States. As Sanford's (2003) statement shows, the poverty that Indigenous people experience in Guatemala is deeply connected to the legacy of colonial violence that took place during the civil war, as well as the broader colonial history of the four invasions.

The fourth invasion that Batz (2017) refers to encompasses colonialism in its most modern expression in Guatemala. He describes the construction of "megaprojects" such as hydroelectric dams, and mining projects which continue to displace Indigenous communities, destroy the communities' land and natural resources, and undermine the subsistence economies on which they depend. Exploiting the natural resources of colonized countries for the benefit of colonial powers like the United States and Europe is nothing new (Galeano, 1997). However, neo-liberal economic agreements have made the flow of capital across borders easier (Harvey, 2007). Although neo-liberalism encourages the free-flow of capital across borders, it does precisely the opposite with migrants fleeing from the conditions created by neo-liberal capitalism. While multi-national mining corporations are invited to "develop" Indigenous land in Guatemala and extract natural resources, the people seeking to escape the conditions created by those policies are criminalized (De León, 2015).

This context is critical to understanding conditions in the communities in Guatemala where I did my research. It's critical in understanding why people are forced to leave their communities and come to the United States. My participants told me about ongoing battles with the government which is seeking to exploit the natural resources in their land and privatize their sources of water. They told me about recent confrontations with mining operations. They described attempts by representatives from multi-national agricultural companies to introduce seeds that do not reproduce, so that communities would be forced to buy seeds from those corporations every year, instead of depending on the past year's crop, as they have done for millennia. Many of my participants spoke

about their communities as being under constant attack from the government and from multi-national corporate interests.

Jesus, for example, shared some of the community's recent experiences resisting government attempts to seize and exploit their land. Jesus is a former leader of the community, previously elected to be president of his community's *comité*:

> Para el gobierno ahorita casi no somos nada. Quieren sacar toda clase de minas… todas esas montañas… gracias a nosotros que eso todavía esta. El gobierno iba a abarcar todas las tierras municipales. Y todas las montañas casi los iba a ocupar. Y sabe por las minas, por el agua, por los árboles, por los bosques, por todo lo que hay. Pero como nosotros estamos organizados, yo creo que nosotros también tenemos valor. Tenemos leyes también. Somos leyes también.
>
> For the government we are almost nothing. They want to make all kinds of mines… all those mountains… thanks to us they are still there. The government was going to take over all the municipal land. They were going to occupy all the mountains. You know, for the mines, for the water, for the trees, for the forests, for everything that there is here. But we are organized and I think we also have courage. We have laws too. We are the law here.

Jesus spoke to the community's ongoing struggle with the government and international mining interests to protect their land and natural resources. He highlighted the community's strength, organization and power in the face of repeated attempts to exploit their land saying, "we are the law here." When I interviewed Jesus, I recalled an experience that happened when he and a group of men took me up the mountain to look for a rare plant. The place he took me to contained a natural artesian well which provided water to the community. As we walked through the woods, we noticed a pick-up truck parked far off the road so it could not be seen by vehicles driving by. The men, not recognizing the truck, were immediately suspicious. They took out their machetes and,

instructing me to stay back, cautiously went to investigate. I asked Jesus if he was worried the truck could belong to people with nefarious intentions, who might be looking to remove the community's control of their water supply. Jesus responded:

> Oh si, había la camioneta. Yo creo que si porque cuando fui líder de la comunidad me llamaron de la municipalidad y dijeron que quisieron abarcar todo esa como tierra municipal… pero esa es tierra comunitaria. Es casi de la comunidad… Iban a abarcar todo que es la montaña y ponerle en un área protegida. Lo que dice esa área protegida es igual que si nosotros fuéramos débiles y … si hubiéramos firmado, allí si, con esa firma estamos vendiendo nuestro derecho. Pero como te acabo de decir, cualquier cosa que pasa, cualquier información de parte del gobierno tenemos que hacer una reunión. ¡Y la gente decidieron que NO! Y todavía eso ahorita está en proceso.
>
> Oh yes, there was the truck. I think so because when I was the leader of the community, they called me from the municipal government and they said they wanted to take all the municipal land… but that is community land. The land belongs to the community… they were going to take all of the mountain and put it in a protected area. Calling it a "protected area" is the same as saying that we are weak… if we had signed, with that signature, we would be selling our rights. But as I said, anything that happens, any piece of information from the government, we have to call a community meeting. And people decided 'NO!' But that's still an ongoing process.

Jesus spoke to his experiences as president of *el comité,* standing up to government attempts at taking his community's land and natural resources. When I asked whether he was concerned about the pick-up truck being near the community's water source, he recalled earlier attempts by the government to seize land. Jesus also recalled the struggles of neighboring communities fighting to protect their land from the government and from multi-national mining interests intent on exploiting it:

> Tanto como en Barrias como partes de San Mateo -- más por allá en Playa Grande -- allí si hay minería…pelearon, pero ya pagaron con sangre y con fuerza, bueno más bien con cárceles. Hay gente que fueron encarcelados y

> de eso tenemos miedo. Tememos eso en este tiempo. Y bueno no sentimos libre de esto…
>
> In Barrias, in parts of San Mateo – over there in Playa Grande – yes there are mines there… they fought, and they paid with blood and with violence, actually with prison. There were people who were imprisoned and we are fearful of that. We are afraid of that right now. So no, we don't feel free of this…

Jesus recalled how leaders in neighboring communities were repressed and incarcerated for their opposition to establishing mines on their land, and he expressed fear that similar violence could happen in his community. He described the tactics used by the government to divide Indigenous communities and exploit the natural resources on their land:

> Buscarían a los meros líderes, a los que saben, a los que tienen más palabra para que los demás no sepan. Así hicieron en San Mateo y Barias. Eso es lo que hacen… Aquí normalmente lo que hacen es buscar el líder de la comunidad. Pero como estamos organizado. Si el líder acepta el trato sin consultarse con la comunidad entera, entonces el será castigado de parte de la comunidad. Entonces la comunidad decide que puede hacer con él. Por eso tenemos leyes comunitarias internas. A veces ofrecen miles de dinero para vender su gente, pero no, no aceptamos eso.
>
> They would look for the leaders, for those who had knowledge, for those whose words had weight so that the rest wouldn't know. That's what they did in San Mateo and Barias. That is what they did… here usually what they do is they look for community leaders. But we are organized. If any leader accepts a deal without consulting with the entire community, then he will be punished by the community. So, the community decides what to do with him. That's why we have internal community laws. Sometimes, they offer thousands of dollars to sell out their people, but no, we don't accept that.

Jesus spoke about the communities surrounding San Pedro Soloma as being deeply impacted by neoliberal capitalism and multi-national attempts to exploit their land and natural resources. He described the tactics that the Guatemalan state and multi-national

corporations use to divide communities, and buy the loyalties of community leaders. Above all, he described a necessity for vigilance and community organization in the face of extreme, constant pressure. He made connections between his community's level of organization and the pressures that community leaders face to capitulate to the interests of the state and multi-national corporations. He portrayed being organized as a necessity for self-defense. Jesus also expressed his concern that the conflict over resources could lead to violence reminiscent of that experienced during the civil war:

> Que estamos libres al cien por ciento no creo porque en cualquier momento puede pasar muchas cosas… Ahorita de parte de los gobiernos hay muchos comentarios que si puede pasar cosas otra vez como antes… Que puede empezar la guerra otra vez por muchas cosas. Por parte de los gobiernos ahorita. Claro que, si tenemos gobierno, pero son corruptos. Hay mucha corrupción… Como te acabo de decir en cualquier rato, cualquier tiempo, cualquier cosa puede pasar… Ahorita no te puedo decir que 'si podemos ganar,' pero hoy en día si hay posibilidad. Si vamos a unirnos… Porque tú sabes donde hay unión hay fuerza.
>
> I can't say that we are 100% free. I don't think so because in any moment, many things can happen… right now, there's a lot of comments made by the government that things can happen again just like before… that another war can begin for many reasons. Because of the government right now. Of course, we have a government, but they are corrupt. There is so much corruption… like I just said, at any moment, any time, anything can happen… right now I can't say "we will win,' but these days it's possible. If we united… because, you know, where there is unity there is strength.

Jesus described the tension that exists between Mayan communities and the Guatemalan state as a result of the continuing struggle for the control of land and autonomy. He also painted a picture of a community that is under constant attack from extractivist industries and the state security forces who stand up for their interests. He expressed concern that the tensions between the government and Indigenous people could lead to another civil

war, “en cualquier rato (at any moment).” Jesus made it clear that the violence of the civil war was not a thing of the past, but an ongoing process with the potential to reignite at any moment. His concerns speak to what Sanford (2003) calls a “living memory of terror” (p. 142), a remnant of the violence and trauma that many rural Mayas experienced during the civil war. For Jesus, the peace accords that ended the civil war did not mark a fundamental re-orientation in the way the Guatemalan state relates to Mayan communities but a continuance of it. The extractivist exploitation Indigenous communities currently face in Huehuetenango is part of the same colonial history that led to the eruption of the civil war. Jesus concluded, “I can’t say ‘we will win,’ but these days it’s possible… where there is unity there is strength.” This is an important recognition that shows that Indigenous Mayas in Guatemala are not passive victims of state violence but hold valuable forms of agency and power. Jesus’ statement that through unity, his community can prevail serves as an important example of the power and agency that Indigenous Guatemalans possess.

As important as it is to understand how neo-liberal capitalism impacts the Indigenous communities where I did my research, it’s also important to understand how those communities organize and resist the theft and exploitation of their lands. From the moment I arrived, I was amazed by how organized the communities were. I perceived the two *aldeas* where I conducted research to be autonomous Indigenous communities.

With few exceptions, nearly everything in these communities, seems to exist because of the organizing and labor of the people who live there. I observed community members repair roads, build houses and build schools. More than this, they have

complete control over their communities. They control who enters and who does not. They have governing bodies that Jesus referenced as *comités* which create community laws. There are also communal responsibilities which everyone must participate in. My observations speak to important aspects of many Indigenous communities in Latin America -- what other have called comunalidad or communalism (Morales et al., 2019; Urrieta Jr & Calderón, 2019; Urrieta, 2013) and show how communal responsibilities or *cargos* (Alberto, 2017) are an important part of community life. During my stay in both communities, I would frequently hear the voices of community leaders projected on loud-speakers echoing across the face of the mountain reading off lists of names – individuals whose turn it was to help with the construction of the school, patrol the community at night, guard the cemetery, pick up trash, or help with a plethora of other responsibilities necessary for the regular functioning of community life. Speaking to the importance of being organized, Jesús reflected:

> Para nosotros es muy importante ser organizado porque hoy en día hay mucha delincuencia, extorción, secuestradores, bueno muchas cosas. Si te contaría hay muchas cosas. Es por eso está organizada la comunidad, tienen sus leyes. En la municipalidad tienen sus leyes, pero en la comunidad, en la aldea tenemos nuestras leyes internas … las autoridades nos *tienen* que respetar entonces tenemos autoridades en nuestra comunidad también… Queremos una comunidad en paz donde … cada uno se respeta y cada uno se ayuda. Eso es. Es por eso tenemos leyes y una organización, aparte de la municipal… o sea estamos bien organizados.
>
> For us it's very important to be organized because nowadays there is a lot of crime, extortion, kidnapping, lots of things. I could tell you, lots of things. That's why the community is organized, why we have laws. In the municipal government, they have their laws, but in the community, in *la aldea* we have our own internal laws… the authorities *have* to respect us because we have authority in our own communities too… We want a

> community at peace where everyone respects and helps each other. That's it. That's why we have laws and are organized, separate from the municipal government… in other words we are very organized.

Jesus spoke to the importance of the community being organized in the face of violence that much of the country faces. He referred to street violence -- Guatemala has the 16th highest murder rate in the world (*Intentional Homicides (per 100,000 People)* | *Data*, 2017) but he also referred to the continued colonial violence experienced by the community and the community's ongoing struggle to maintain control over its land and resources. He associated organization with power, saying "las autoridades nos *tienen* que respetar (the authorities *have* to respect us)." He associated internal laws and organization with peace and respect, implying that the only way the community will be at peace is through their own self-governance without the intervention of the state. Jesus continued by speaking to the importance of education, asserting that education was a means by which the community could defend itself from government and multi-national interests looking to exploit Indigenous land and resources:

> La gente, y la comunidad, casi la mayoría del pueblo al nivel municipal de Soloma se dieron cuenta que es muy importante porque el estudio es que te abre los ojos en diferentes formas. Mas en leyes más en defensa propia. Según se puede defender de las personas que saben más, pero según los comentarios de los antepasados antes no saben nada. No sabían leer, no sabían escribir…Y dicen que antes… los ladinos… Usaban nuestros antepasados, nuestros abuelos anteriores… Son como esclavos para ellos… es cuando se dieron cuenta los antepasados que el estudio vale mucho…. Entonces ya en medio de leyes, en medio del estudio porque antes según el comentario de los antepasados nadie sabe un poquito de español… los ladinos… son racistas. Y por eso hoy en día se dieron cuenta que el estudio vale mucho. El estudio creo que es otro valor que tiene uno. Bueno yo veo en mi persona, que por cualquier cosa y que uno ya se puede defender. Se puede decir que esta cosa no se hace de esta forma.

> The people, and the community, almost everyone in Soloma, realized that it's very important because education is what opens your eyes in different ways. Most of all about laws and about self-defense. It allows you to defend yourself from people who know more, but according to what the ancestors tell us, before they did know that. They didn't know how to read, or how to write. They say that before… the Ladinos… used our ancestors, our grandparents from before… they were slaves to them… That's when the ancestors realized that education was so important… So, in terms of laws, in terms of education because according to what the ancestors say, before, no one knew Spanish… the Ladinos… are racist. And that's why today we value education. Education I think is one of the values that we have. I see in my own case, that whatever happens, I can defend myself. I can say, "this shouldn't be done this way."

Jesus identified education as an important way for the community to defend itself from exploitation and the theft of their land and resources at the hands of multi-national mining corporations and the Guatemalan state. In particular, he identified learning to read, write and speak Spanish as important skills that allow Indigenous people to access power and defend themselves from exploitation. Jesus is clear that this is a lesson learned from his ancestors' experience. He calls education a "value" of the community.

While engaging in participant observation in Jesus' community, I participated in the construction of a new school which was damaged by a mudslide. The residents of the *aldea* were each responsible for contributing to the construction of the school. Men and male youth who were not in school worked for one day a week on the construction of the school; women took shifts being responsible for preparing lunch and snacks for those who were working. Everyone pitched in financially to cover the cost of construction, including community members living in the United States. I observed the community making sacrifices, and devoting significant amounts of labor, resources and time to the

construction of the school. The physical work was all done by hand without the assistance of large machinery. For the brief period of time that I participated, I carried bags of cement, mixed and poured concrete, and helped to dig large holes in the ground. The time and labor that I witnessed community members investing in the construction of the school is a testament to their valuing of education as a means for self-defense against colonial forms of exploitation. My observations highlight the agency and power that communities in San Pedro Soloma wield through collective organizing and action. This power and agency is often deeply connected to important forms of Indigenous knowledge, exemplified by Jesus' reference to learning about the value of education from the lessons of his ancestors.

To understand the experiences of my youth participants, it is critical to understand the socioeconomic and political realities of the communities where they originate. These communities face intense challenges and violence and are engaged in a sustained struggle to resist the theft of their land and resources, the exploitation of their labor, the destruction of their traditional subsistence economies, and the violence inflicted by the state and multi-national corporations. Colonization is both a historical and an ongoing process that deeply impacts the communities where I conducted research, my youth participants, and their families. At the same time, my participants possess valuable forms of agency and Indigenous knowledge, visible through the kinds of organization that exist within their communities, the investments the community is making in the construction of a community school, and the lessons my participants state they have learned from the struggles and experience of their ancestors.

Memories of childhood and schooling in the *aldea*

I sat with Tuto in the car in Northwestern Washington State. It was night; he was at work at his job as a security guard of an old abandoned factory. It was dark and eerie. The factory was huge and contained numerous old buildings that formerly housed heavy machinery, warehouses full of merchandise and offices. At that point, it had been abandoned for many years. It was pitch black except for the far-off lights of street lamps and the light of the moon and stars. Periodically, Tuto would start up the former police car that his company had given him to patrol the facility, turn on the spotlight and cruise around the compound looking for intruders. The place was full of broken and boarded up windows. Graffiti was everywhere. At times, when the spotlight shone into a window, I could see black walls, and old, rusted metal inside. On an old door locked with a padlock, the words, "the dead live here" were written in red spray paint.

Most of the time when I was with Tuto we would sit in the car and talk. We talked about all kinds of things: food – which was one of his passions – and soccer, another one of his passions. We also talked about the way alcohol has impacted his family, what he misses most from his community of origin, and what it means to be Indigenous. In one of those conversations we talked about the things he missed in his *aldea* which I was scheduled to visit soon to conduct research. As I sat on the trunk of his car at around 1:00 AM, Tuto gazed off into space and nostalgically listed what he remembered and missed the most: "los tamales, el atol, el café (the *tamales*, the *atol*, [a traditional drink usually made of corn], the coffee)," he said. "la gente poniendo su música, las chimeneas echando humo por la tarde. Ooooh el café (people playing their music, the chimeneas

smoking in the afternoon. Ooooh *the coffee)"* he emphasized. I asked him: "el café no es igual que aquí? The coffee isn't the same as here?"

"No," he responded emphatically, "es diferente (it's different)." He continued, "quisiera ir contigo! Me encanta allá. Es bonita, las montañas, la gente. Lo único mal es que se gana muy poquito (I wish I could go with you! I love that place. It's beautiful: the mountains, the people. The only bad thing is that you earn very little."

For Tuto the memories of his community of origin were special and cherished. When speaking to the things he missed, he talked about food, people, landscapes and everyday experiences like smoke coming out of people's chimeneas during the afternoon. His recollections point to a sense of connection to place and community which he maintains while living in diaspora in the United States. He mentioned a burning desire to return to his community and visit, but an inability to do so because of his undocumented status. At the same time, he also pointed to the reason he felt the need to leave his family and community when he said, "the only bad thing is you earn very little." For Tuto, as with my other two youth participants, the primary motivation to leave Guatemala was economic.

All three of my youth participants described their childhoods as being marked with fond memories and connections to their families and communities in spite of a constant struggle to survive financially that limited the opportunities available to them. Describing happy memories of his childhood, Edgar said,

> Era algo bonito. Me lo divertía con mis hermanos. Jugábamos. Era algo normal… Llevar la vida normal con toda la familia… Nos juntábamos yo y mis hermanos y mis primos jugábamos varios juegos entonces nos

> gustaba hacer muchas cosas como… canicas, trompo, futbol eso nos hacía feliz a lo mejor porque éramos niños. Era algo bonito.
>
> It was beautiful. I had fun with my siblings. We played. It was normal… Living a normal life with the whole family…. My siblings, cousins and I would get together and play different games and we liked to do a lot of different things like… marbles, top, soccer. That made us happy. It must've been because we were kids. It was beautiful.

Edgar had happy memories of his childhood playing with his siblings and cousins. For him, those memories were happy because his family was together – at that time, his father was still in Guatemala, not in the US, and seven of his eight siblings lived in Guatemala as well. Tuto expressed similar recollections. When asked about life growing up in his *aldea*, he said, "era normal. Jugué con los chicos del barrio (It was normal. I played with the kids from the neighborhood)." Similarly, Domingo recalled happy memories playing with friends:

> Lo que yo estoy viviendo ahorita no puedo regresarlo atrás, pero para mí fue bonita porque tuve muchos amigos y crecimos juntos salíamos juntos y fuimos a la escuela juntos y ahora ya no se pueden regresar atrás.
>
> What I am living right now – I can't go back. It was nice for me because I had a lot of friends and we grew up together, we would go out together and we went to school together, and now I can't go back to that.

Tuto, Edgar and Domingo's recollections serve as important reminders that their decision to leave their families and communities of origin was a difficult, painful but necessary one.

My participants talked about their experiences with school in their *aldeas*. For all of my participants, school was something that they were motivated to pursue. But they also described financial obstacles that impeded their ability to pursue education.

Although it is increasingly common for children in Soloma to attend school until the 6th grade, it is not a universal practice and not all families have the financial means to participate. My participants described watching their families go through tremendous sacrifices so they could attend school. In my interview with Tuto, we talked about his desire to pursue education, and his concern about the financial pressures his education was placing on his family. Tuto spent the later years of his childhood at his maternal grandparents' household. As his grandparents struggled financially, Tuto realized that his grandfather needed help working in the corn fields and started to work at a very young age, before he was 10 years old. His mother was in the United States working to support him, and his father was not involved in his life. Speaking to his desire to attend school, Tuto recalled watching an uncle of a similar age going off to school and wishing he had that opportunity:

> Mi tío con que yo crecí iba a la escuela y cada vez que regresaba a la escuela tenía sus libros y sus dibujos… A veces traía juguetes de la escuela, y decía que tenía amigos, y dije "noo, si quiero ir a la escuela." Luego me ponía a rayar en sus libros y repasar los libros que hacía y ojalá que las tuviera también. Si a veces le robaba libros para verlos y dibujar.
>
> My uncle who I grew up with went to school, and every time that he returned from school, he had his books and his drawings. Sometimes he would bring toys from school, and he said he had friends, and I said "noo, I want to go to school." Then I would go and draw in his books and draw over the things he had already done and I wished I had them too. Yes, sometimes I stole his books to look at them and draw.

Around the age of 10, Tuto had the opportunity to start school. He described his excitement of going to school for the first time:

> Estaba yo emocionado al ir a la escuela. Me cambie la noche anterior… quería escribir ya… mi primer día en la escuela fue bonito. Fue demasiado

> especial… llegó la hora y no esperaba para entrar a la escuela. Luego llegué - vi a los niños, y estaba bien feliz. Hice amigos, hacia las tareas, pasé mis clases. Aprendí a leer el primer año como al medio año. No sé cómo pasó, pero si aprendí a leer rápido.
> I was excited to go to school. I changed the night before… I wanted to write already… my first day in school was beautiful. It was so special… the time came, and I couldn't wait to go to school. Then I arrived and I saw the kids and I was very happy. I made friends, I did homework, I passed my classes. I learned to read that first year after about a half year. I don't know how, but I learned to read quickly.

Although he started school later than usual, Tuto took obvious pride in his rapid progress in learning to read. He highlighted the aspects of school that he most cherished: the opportunity to gain academic skills like how to read and write and the social aspects of making new friends with other kids.

Domingo started attending school at 7 years old. When I asked him to talk about his experience at school, he mentioned the lack of funding for the school in his *aldea*. In particular, he talked about the lack of classroom space which made it necessary to have multiple grades in the same class:

> A veces me acuerdo cuando yo estoy asistiendo la escuela aquí y comparo las cosas, y son muy distintas por falta de economía. Y pues, allá -- fue una experiencia un poco duro aprender, porque la escuela era muy pequeña y tuve que estar cuando yo era en primer grado -- tuve que estar con los de segundo y tercero en la misma aula.
>
> Sometimes I remember when I am going to school here and I compare things, and they are so different because of a lack of financial resources. There, it was -- an experience where it was a kind of hard to learn, because the school was very small and I had to be there when I was in first grade – I had to be with students from second and third grade in the same classroom.

Domingo's school experiences were impacted by a lack of school funds. He went on to describe how this impacted his education, and how the teacher spent less time with him

and his first grade classmates because her attention was split between grade levels. When I asked Domingo what he learned in school, he talked about learning to read, write and speak Spanish. Previously, he said, he only spoke Q'anjob'al.

> Aprendí a leer y escribir y hablar en español… empecé de cero a escribir en español, leer en español. Palabras, nombres de cosas, adjetivos… Eso es donde allí trate de aprender el español porque básicamente hablaba Q'anjob'al.
> I learned to read and to write and to speak in Spanish… I started writing in Spanish and reading in Spanish from zero. Words, the names of things, adjectives… that is where I tried to learn Spanish because basically, before, I only spoke Q'anjoba'al.

In a subsequent interview, I followed up with Domingo about his response to this question and I asked him why he felt it was important to learn Spanish. He responded, "básicamente, eso es lo que uno requiere para obtener un trabajo o en una tienda o algo así. Es hablar Español (basically, that is what would be required to get a job at a store or something like that. To speak Spanish)." Domingo equated language ability in Spanish with increased economic opportunity (Barillas Chón, 2019). He made clear that ability to speak, read and write Spanish would allow him access to better jobs like working at a store.

In fact, language is an important part of Guatemala's colonial, racial hierarchy and often serves as a proxy for race. Bitar, Pimentel and Juarez (2008) call this the "ideological loading of languages" (p. 28), and describe how, "languages do not merely serve as a means of communication… but have come to represent a currency that can be used to gain social status, employment, and material goods [in Guatemala]" (p.28). For Domingo, the ability to speak Spanish was important because it was the colonial

language of power in Guatemala. A fluency in Spanish offered more status and opportunity whereas mono-lingual practices in Q'anjob'al would have limited the economic opportunities available to him. I also asked Domingo if he felt that maintaining his ability to speak Q'anjob'al was important. He responded:

> Hay como 23 idiomas al lado de Español [en Guatemala] y entonces somos herencia Maya que nosotros llevamos eso en la sangre y nos llevas donde quieras. No importa dónde vas… simplemente tu idioma, tu raíz, lo llevas en todas partes. Y yo digo que en varias formas eso se tendría que respetar.
>
> There are like 23 languages apart from Spanish [in Guatemala] and so we are of Mayan heritage. We carry that in our blood and take it with us wherever we go. It doesn't matter where I go… It's just, your language, your roots, you carry that with you everywhere. And I say that in many ways, that needs to be respected.

Domingo connected Q'anjob'al with his Maya, Indigenous identity. He also powerfully proclaimed the importance of his Indigeneity. For Domingo, his Indigeneity is something that he carries with him everywhere he goes. His commitment to Q'anjob'al speaks to the resiliency of Maya communities in the face of ongoing colonial practices that seek to pressure Indigenous people in Guatemala to assimilate, and to abandon their Indigenous identities, cultures and languages (Bitar et al., 2008; England, 2003; Falbo & De Baessa, 2006; Martínez & Mesinas, 2019; Morales et al., 2019). It also speaks to Domingo's own agency in the face of these pressures. When Domingo proclaimed, "that needs to be respected," he is speaking to the vital importance of respecting Q'anjob'al as a part of his own cultural identity as an Indigenous Maya youth.

Eventually all three of my youth participants reached a point in their education where the financial pressures facing their families became too great and interfered with

their ability to continue in school. For Domingo and Tuto this happened after the 6th grade – what is considered primary school. For Eddie, this happened after the 5th grade. During my interviews with Tuto, Eddie and Domingo, all three described the intense financial pressures facing their families including a need to work to support their parents and grandparents. This has important implications for educators in U.S. schools because of the unique needs that SLIFE like Tuto, Domingo and Edgar have of their teachers and schools (L. J. P. Pentón Herrera, 2019).

Describing the conditions of poverty that his family lived in that made it difficult to pursue education, Eddie talked about the house he and his family lived in when he was younger:

> En Guatemala, no llegábamos a hacer una casa así de bloque o de madera, era para nosotros - costaba caro las cosas, y pues ese tiempo que digo - nuestra casa estaba rodeado de nylon, y un par de láminas encima. Por eso entraba frio y sentíamos frio… Era algo duro cuando empezaba a llover, eso era algo que a veces hasta recordarlo me dan ganas de llorar… Queríamos salir adelante, por eso mi hermano se vino acá, mi papá se vino acá. Entonces mi papá hizo la casa para que ya no sufriéramos… Era algo doloroso.
> In Guatemala, we didn't have a house made of cinderblocks or of wood, for us – the materials were expensive, and well, in that time that I'm talking about – our house was surrounded by nylon, with a couple sheets of corrugated tin on top. That's why it got cold, and we felt cold… It was hard when it started to rain. That was something that - sometimes even just remembering it makes me want to cry… We wanted to get ahead, that's why my brother came here, my father came here. My father made a house for us so we wouldn't suffer anymore… it was very painful

Eddie's house - made with materials that were inadequate to protect from the elements – caused substantial hardship and anguish to his family. The difficult financial situation of his family prevented them from building a house that would provide necessary shelter. It

was also the reason why Eddie's father and oldest brother first left for the United States during Eddie's lifetime. Though Eddie's father had previously migrated to the United States fleeing the violence of the civil war (as described previously in this chapter), Eddie identified poverty as the factor that pushed his father to leave his family and community and look for ways of providing for them during this period in his life. As Eddie describes, the separation of his family felt very painful for him. And the memory of what it was like to struggle with the housing conditions he describes made him sad. After the fifth grade, Eddie had to stop attending school to work and support his family.

Tuto and Domingo experienced similar obstacles in their education. I asked Tuto why he needed to leave school. He responded:

> Porque ya tenías que pagar por cosas que necesitas. Tenías que pagar para ir a hacer las investigaciones, la tarea. Tenías demasiado tarea y tenías que pagar por todo y no tenía los recursos… Y a veces no tenía para los trabajos verdad… Y bueno pasé los grados, nunca los perdí. Las pasé. Y luego fue cuando me di cuenta que ya la escuela no era para mí. Que tenía que trabajar verdad…
> Because by that time you had to pay for things that you needed. You had to pay to go and do projects, homework. You had a lot of homework and you had to pay for everything and I didn't have the resources… Sometimes I didn't have the money to pay for the homework materials, right?... but I got good grades, I never lost them. I passed. But that's when I realized that school wasn't for me anymore. That I had to work…

For Tuto, the financial cost of going to school proved to be too great a barrier. Nevertheless, he was clear in saying that up until he made the decision to leave school to work, his grades always remained good and he always passed his classes. Tuto continued speaking about the sacrifices he saw his grandfather make so he could go to school:

> Mi abuelo a veces tenía que prestar del vecino para que yo pudiera ir a hacer la tarea… Y bueno yo no quería eso… porque se endeudaba por mi

> culpa y me di cuenta que si quedaba en la escuela que iba a hacer? ¿Si me graduaba… que? de que iba a trabajar? Porque allí es difícil conseguir un trabajo excepto que estudias en la universidad. Y eso es en Guatemala y eso era un sueño que era lejos de allá. En mi comunidad creo que nadie termina yendo a la universidad. Solo terminan el grado 6 y a trabajar en el campo. Sali de la escuela a los 14 años y me fui a trabajar. Fue cuando no quise ir a la escuela ya y a ponerme a trabajar.
>
> My grandpa sometimes had to borrow money from the neighbor so that I could do my homework… and, well, I didn't want that… because he was going into debt and it was my fault and I realized that if I stayed in school, what was I going to do? If I graduated… than what? What kind of work was I going to do? Because over there it's difficult to find a job except if you go to university. And that in Guatemala was a dream that was far away. In my community, I don't think anyone ended up going to a university. They just finish 6th grade and go to work in the fields. I got out of school at 14 years old and I went to work. That's when I didn't want to go to school anymore, I just wanted to go to work.

Tuto described the series of factors that led to his decision to stop attending school including watching his grandfather go into debt to support his education. He also talked about attaining a university education as "a dream that was far away," because no one in his community had ever gone to a university. His experience speaks to the exclusion of Indigenous Mayas from traditional halls of power like higher education in Guatemala (Batz, 2018) and shows how the colonial, racial caste system still deeply impacts the lives of my youth participants and their families. For him, he desperately wanted to pursue his studies, but the colonial realities that determine economic and educational access for Indigenous people in Guatemala prevented him from doing so. The alternative was to go to work.

My interviews and observations highlight a special connection to place and community that my youth participants share, and maintain while living in diaspora in the

United States. All of my youth participants pursued education, with the support and encouragement of their families in their *aldeas*. Often times, their families made tremendous sacrifices to allow them the opportunity to attend school. My participants showed agency and resilience in the face of colonial practices by using school to learn Spanish, the colonial language of power and economic opportunity in Guatemala. At the same time, it was critical for them and their families to maintain their own Indigenous cultural identities as Q'anjob'al speakers. In the case of all three of my youth participants, the conditions of poverty, shaped by an ongoing colonial and neoliberal history, made continued attendance in school unrealistic as they opted to work instead to support their families.

Chapter Three: Migration and Schooling in the United States

> Lo echo de menos salir a la montaña, cortar leñas, algunas veces lo extraño. Y yo digo que si algún día llegaría allá yo haría esas cosas. Extraño poner leñas encima de la mula yo solo… esas cosas lo extraño, y también lo extraño mi familia y mi hermana, mis hermanas. También extraño a mi mama más que todo… mi abuela, y todas las familias en generales.
>
> I miss going out to the mountain, cutting firewood; I miss it sometimes. And I think that if some day I were to return there, I would do those things. I miss loading firewood on the mule all by myself… I miss those things, and I also miss my family and my sister… my sisters. I also miss my mom more than anything… my grandma, and all of my family in general.

Migration

These words were said to me by Domingo as we sat at his house in Washington during an interview. At the time, I thought they were important because they conveyed a sense of connection to Domingo's community in San Pedro Soloma. Yet, Domingo's words do far more than convey a general sense of missing his community, A connection to place is an important part of Indigeneity for many (Simpson, 2017; Styres, 2018). For Styres (2018), a relationship with place and land is a critical part of her own Indigenous epistemology. Detailing the importance of this relationship she writes:

> "Land is at once storied and relational informing the social, spiritual, and systemic norms and practices of a particular culture-sharing group in relationship to their places… Indigenous people exist in deeply intimate and sacred relationships with Land—it is the relationship that comes before all else (Styres, 2018, p. 28).

Simpson (2017) speaks to similar importances for her people, the Nishnaabeg. For Simpson (2017), a relationship with the land forms the basis for a uniquely Indigenous way of being in the world. It forms the root of Nishnaabeg intelligence and ways of

knowing. It is *central* to Nishnaabeg identity. Though it is important not to fall into the trap of essentializing; Indigenous societies are hugely diverse and should not be generalized as homogenous, Simpson's (2017) and Styres (2018) make clear that a connection to land and place is an important part of their Indigeneity.

In Domingo's quote, his connection to his *aldea*, his family and the tasks that formed the daily routines of life like chopping firewood and loading his mule, were clear. He missed performing these tasks, and missed the ways of life where these activities were common. He also expressed a pride and a sense of value for being able to do these things himself. During our interview, Domingo was clear that usually, chopping wood and loading a mule with firewood takes two people; it is hard, physical work. He expressed pride in being able to do it himself. Domingo also expressed deeply missing his family including his mother, grandmother and sisters. These connections formed a critical component of Domingo's identity as an Indigenous person. Yet, for Maya, immigrant youth, the experience of migration and of living in diaspora, often entails needing to navigate difficult and shifting landscapes of power that force them to find new ways of adapting their Indigeneity to the new social, cultural and historical contexts they encounter (Blackwell et al., 2017). There is an important lesson here which Blackwell et al. (2017) discuss: Indigeneity is not static, and Indigenous people do not stop being Indigenous once they migrate.

Critical Latinx Indigeneities offers an important perspective here, that the experiences, histories, cultures and identities of Indigenous Latinx youth like Domingo should not simply be collapsed into a homogenous and generalizing category of

"Latinidad." CLI offers the importance of recognizing multiple "Latinidades," and distinguishes between the experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Latinx youth. Schools are important sites for identity production, which can serve to either reinforce cultural identities or to devalue them. Unfortunately, the unique aspects of Indigeneity that are frequently important to Maya youth are often overlooked by institutions like schools which frequently do not acknowledge that Indigenous Latinx youth possess unique identities, experiences and histories that non-Indigenous Latinxs do not (Alberto, 2017; Barillas Chón, 2019; Barillas-Chón, 2010; Blackwell et al., 2017; Casanova, 2019; López & Irizarry, 2019; Morales et al., 2019; L. J. Pentón Herrera, 2019; Vásquez, 2019). Schools may also act as active sites of assimilation, that whether intentionally or not, may encourage youth to abandon their Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Morales et al., 2019), and frame their important connections to their family and community funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) as a deficit (Ek, 2009; Valencia & Black, 2002) rather than an asset (Urrieta, 2013; Valenzuela, 1999).

For all three of my youth participants, leaving their families and communities was very difficult because of the connection to place, community and family which formed an important part of their Indigeneity. As Domingo said during his interview: "Me acuerdo de [mi mamá]. Yo digo que me acuerdo de ella todos los días… los recuerdos que nosotros vivimos juntos (I remember my Mom. I would say that I remember her every day… and of the memories that we lived together). Despite the intense connections that Domingo felt for his family and community, the imperative to search for economic opportunity, because of the social, economic and political exclusion experienced by

Mayas in Guatemala, forced him to leave. As I will explore, economic opportunity was not just a question of searching for financial resources, but of searching for access and power in a new political and social context, since in Guatemala, access to opportunity and power have been systematically denied to Indigenous people. As the interview responses from my youth participants will show, their search for access and power was not just about elevating themselves individually, but about supporting their family and community as well. Throughout their journey, my participants were forced to face complex questions of how to maintain their Indigenous connections with their families and communities of origin despite living in diaspora. While migrating north to the US, upon arrival in the US, and in US schools, the connections they maintained to their families and communities offered motivation for them to persevere through tremendous adversity.

Migration for Indigenous people is not new. In fact, Mayas have been migrating for thousands of years prior to the creation of modern nation-states and borders (Jonas & Rodríguez, 2015). However, the roots of more modern migration from Guatemala to the United States can be traced to the 1970's as people fled the violence, terror and genocide of the civil war. This migration has continued to the present with various ebbs and surges in numbers. Subsequent waves of migration from Guatemala through Mexico created what Jonas and Rodriguez call a 'migration region', which they describe as the set of complex spatial dynamics created by the, "continual movement of Guatemalans and other Central Americans trekking northward" (2015, p. 41. In the case of my participants, it is important to note that the communities where they settle are part of Jonas and Rodriguez'

(2015) migration region as well. They go on to describe separate migratory flows as "spatial extensions of household and community social organization connecting migrants to sending communities, and in many cases to other migrants in US receiving communities." The community where I met these youth should be considered one of those spatial extensions.

As a spatial extension of the Central America-United States migration region, it is important to gain an understanding of Mason County in Washington State, the place where my youth participants ended up. As the largest city in Mason County, Shelton is a small, rural town with an estimated 2018 population of 10,364 people (*U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts*, 2019). While The U.S. Census estimates that 19.4% of Shelton's population is "Hispanic or Latino" and 72% are white, The Office for the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) records 33.8% of the student body of the Shelton School District as "Hispanic or Latino" and 53.8% as white (Office for the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2018-2019). Just North and South of Shelton are the Squaxin Island and Skokomish Nation tribes. In fact, Shelton is located on land which was taken from the Skokomish and Squaxin tribes by settlers during the late 1800's. Located on the tip of the Puget Sound, Shelton's economy was traditionally dominated by the timber industry and was home to Simpson Logging Company. Since the 1990's, Shelton's economy has undergone gradual but persistent neoliberal shifts as jobs in the timber industry were outsourced. This is important to highlight. Neoliberalism is often discussed as an economic philosophy that only negatively impacts countries in the global south, yet this is far from true. Neoliberalism has decimated Shelton, and contributed to sharp rises in

poverty. Both Shelton and the communities in Guatemala that my participants migrate from are highly impacted by neoliberal economic policies. It is ironic that immigrants, who have been pushed to migrate because of neoliberal attacks on their communities in Guatemala, are blamed in Shelton for "stealing jobs," that in reality evaporated as a result of the same neoliberal economic policies that have negatively impacted Indigenous people in Guatemala. Once a strong union town, outsourcing, along with factory and mill closures have decimated once well-paying union jobs in the community. Many Indigenous Guatemalan immigrants engage in seasonal work, rotating between the forestry industry and landscaping.

Shelton experiences high rates of poverty, and poor health indicators compared to the rest of the state of Washington. OSPI reports 68.8% of the student body as "low income" for the 2019-2020 academic school year. At the county level, the county health department measures poverty using federal guidelines, which include any family earning below $24,339 a year. 17% of Mason County residents and 27.4% of children fell below this threshold in the 2016 year compared to a state average for children of 16.5% (Mason County Community Health Assessment, 2018). Graduation rates and levels of educational attainment are lower than the state average, while rates of cancer, and substance abuse are significantly higher. Though these statistics are important in understanding the challenges the community faces, they do not portray a complete picture. Shelton is a lively, complex community with many residents working diligently to find solutions to the complex challenges the community faces.

This is a snapshot of some of the economic and health indicators of Shelton and Mason County. The places like Mason County where people migrate to are highly determined by the knowledge and past migratory experiences of family members and social networks who know the terrains and landscapes of the journey (Jonas & Rodríguez, 2015). Usually, migrants will go to places where they have family or where member of their community already live, who can help guide them through the difficult landscapes of a new world. During their journey, the routes that migrants take, and the specific places where they cross borders are highly variable. As Jonas and Rodriguez (2015) state: "Because conditions continually shift in the migration region (partly owing to enforcement activities and the arrival of new actors, e.g., criminal cartels) and because migrants have changing levels of resources, the migration process undergoes constant reorganization at macro and micro levels" (p. 9). This paints a picture of a region highly impacted by the ebbs and flows of migration from Guatemala to the United States with routes generally being determined by social and family networks, who adapt constantly depending on cartel and law enforcement activity.

It is important to note that not all migrants have the same experience. Success or failure, as well as the levels of risk and danger that migrants encounter in their journeys, vary significantly based on a complex set of factors. Migrants with more money to pay guides may have a relatively uneventful experience while migrants with fewer financial resources may die trying to cross dangerous sections of the US-Mexico border (De León, 2015). Women and unaccompanied minors are significantly more vulnerable. Indigenous migrants are also significantly more at risk as they pass through non-Indigenous regions.

As Jonas and Rodriguez (2015) say, “the Indigenous racial identity accompanies Mayan undocumented migrants in the northern trek as they pass through non-Indigenous environments. For some Maya, this identity creates a greater degree than normal of vulnerability to exploitation and abuse” (p. 18).

De Leon (2015) offers a theoretical framework for understanding the experiences of migrants crossing the US-Mexico border. Borrowing from Agamben (1998), De Leon (2015) describes the US-Mexico border as a “state of exception” where the legal structures and rights usually afforded to human beings by nation-states do not apply to unauthorized migrants. Citing the work of Roxanne Doty, De Leon (2015) theorizes that in the state of exception of the US-Mexico border, the lives of migrants entering the US without permission are reduced to ‘bare life,’ or “individuals whose deaths are of little consequence” (p. 28). De Leon’s arguments are useful in understanding migrants’ experiences with violence along the US-Mexico border. I would argue, however, that the state of exception that exists along the US-Mexico border, reducing the value of migrant lives to the realm of ‘bare life,’ can be extended to include their experiences of migration throughout Mexico. This is especially true given recent border policy developments where the Trump administration is outsourcing border enforcement to Mexico (Olivares, 2018). While I was conducting field work in Guatemala, the Mexican military was deployed to the Mexico-Guatemala border after President Trump threatened Mexico with tariffs if they did not concede to his demands (Shear et al., 2019). Throughout my time in San Pedro Soloma, I heard rumors that US federal agents were working with Guatemalan authorities, operating in San Pedro Soloma to arrest *coyotes*.

During their migrations north through Mexico to the United States. Domingo, Tuto and Edgar all reported experiencing fear and adversity. Domingo recalled an experience riding a bus and being stopped by Mexican police. He said that he was advised before he left that he would have to pay off police so that they would not detain, deport or physically abuse him during the journey. In one particular moment while passing through Tecali in Puebla, Mexico, his group and him were ordered off the bus. While he had the money to pay off the police, other youth from his group did not. He recalled watching as they were "brutally beaten" by police. Domingo's foreknowledge of the violence he would experience while migrating, and the strategies he used to survive this violence came from the social networks in his family and community. This speaks to the importance of these informal, social networks in navigating the violence of the complex migration region (Jonas & Rodríguez, 2015) that Maya youth must traverse while migrating to the United States.

Edgar, recalling his migration story, remembered experiencing hunger and cold while migrating. In one particular moment, he was told by the guide who his family had paid to bring him, "Hoy no comemos, mañana tampoco (Today, we don't eat, tomorrow either)." He described being extremely cold that night, being forced to sleep on a floor with no blanket. Later, he called his Dad who knew the coyote he was with. His Dad talked to the coyote after which he delivered a blanket to Edgar. Describing the experience of going days without food and being cold, Edgar remembered:

> Se le va la fuerza… Dormimos en el piso. Dormimos sin comida. La verdad no sabía que pensar…Si me iba a morir de hambre o no, como de

> frio... yo no sabía. El único que hacía era pedirle fuerzas a Dios… Que me daba fuerzas para seguir adelante.
>
> One feels weak… we slept on the floor. We slept without having eaten. The truth is, I didn't know what to think… If I was going to die of hunger or not, or of cold… I didn't know. The only thing I did was to ask God for strength… That he give me the strength to continue.

Edgar's experience of going days without food, being forced to sleep on a cold floor and fearing for his life shows how Maya youth are reduced to 'bare life' while migrating. For Edgar, like Domingo, his community and family social networks formed an important piece of his ability to survive the violence and adversity of his migration to *el norte*. When he experienced cold and hunger, he called his father, who arranged for him to be delivered a blanket.

Tuto left his *aldea* in 2014. When I asked him about his experience traveling through Mexico, he described enduring physical and mental suffering, "siempre estabas sufriendo el viaje de una manera como física y mentalmente porque veías cosas. Te trataban diferente; te trataban como objeto, no te trataban como persona (You were always suffering on the trip whether it be physically or mentally because you would see things. They treated you different; They treated you like an object, they didn't treat you like a person)." When I asked him what "being treated like an object" meant to him, he explained further:

> Como mucha gente tratan a los animales verdad… [Nos daban] comida una vez al día; una comida que era pequeña. Llegabas en la casa de algún extraño. Y te ponían allí como basura creo. Te dejaban en un cuarto así pero no eran como 3 o 5 personas eran demasiado, 30 personas, 40 personas en un cuarto. Entonces tenías que buscar tu lugarcito no. Entonces porque para mí fue como que te trataban como un objeto porque es lo que yo sentí. Te tiraban allí y cerraban la puerta. Y comías una vez al

> día. 2 tortillas, un poquito de arroz, un poquito de frijol era todo y después esperaaabas hasta el otro día para comer. Y cuando te llevaban, no les importaba. Tuvimos que meternos en una mini-van 32 personas. Una arriba del otro arriba del otro… Imagínate 32 personas en una mini-van.
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> Like many people treat animals, right?... [They would give us] food once per day; a little bit of food. You would arrive in the house of some stranger. And they would put you there like garbage. They would leave you in a room, but it wasn't like 3 or 5 people, there were too many: 30 people, 40 people in a room. So, you had to look for your little spot, right? That's why for me it was like they would treat you like an object because that's what I felt. They would throw you in there and close the door. And you would eat once a day; two tortillas, a little bit of rice, a little bit of beans; that was it, and then you would waaaait until the next day to eat again. And when they would transport you, they didn't care. We had to get 32 people into a mini-van. One on top of another on top of another… Imagine, 32 people in a mini-van.

Tuto vividly recalled being treated like an object, an animal and like garbage during his migration through Mexico. He described being given a little bit of food once a day, being crammed into small rooms with dozens of other people and being forced into mini-vans with 32 other people stacked on top of each other. His testimony speaks to the reality of the experience of Maya migrant youth when their value as human beings is reduced to 'bare life' and considered expendable. After he told me this story, I asked him what helped him get through the experience. He said, "[Lo hice] por mi abuela, tenga lo que tenga que pasar lo hare por mi abuela y por mi familia y hermanas (I did it for my grandmother, whatever has to happen will happen, but I will do it for my grandmother and for my family and sisters)." His comments show that he was willing to endure dehumanization, hunger and extreme levels of physical and mental adversity for his family. His comments also show that thinking about his family helped him get through

the experience. Tuto's dedication to his family is an important part of his Indigenous identity.

These three stories are pieces taken from interviews that I conducted with Edgar, Domingo and Tuto. They reveal some of the adversity that they faced while traveling through Mexico. They also reveal the levels of vulnerability that unaccompanied Indigenous youth experience as they cross through the Central America-US migration region. When Edgar was faced with the adversity of sleeping on a floor, and being cold enough that he didn't know if he would survive, he called his family for support and guidance. When Domingo was at risk for being violently assaulted by Mexican police, he remembered advice told to him by a community member. For Tuto, his motivation to help his family helped him endure extremely difficult conditions. For both youths, their community and family connections were a crucial component of their ability to survive the migration north.

These examples also show how the 'state of exception' of the US-Mexico border actually extends far beyond the physical space between the United States and Mexico but extends throughout the Central-North American migration region. A CLI framework adds a critical aspect in understanding the experiences of my Indigenous youth participants as they traveled through this migration region. CLI shows us that Indigenous migrants and the violence and adversity they face during migration is directly connected to the historical, colonial project of racialization which positions Indigenous life as less human, less valuable and expendable (Blackwell et al., 2017; Urrieta Jr & Calderón, 2019).

After a long and arduous migration through Guatemala and Mexico, my participants arrived at the US-Mexico border. De Leon (2015) documents, how, in the 1990's, border patrol started to funnel unauthorized migration to the harshest, most inhospitable and most dangerous border terrain in a policy known as Prevention through Deterrence. In reality, Prevention through Deterrence used the murderous terrain of the desert as a brutal killing machine while allowing US policy makers and Customs and Border Patrol to feign innocence. As De Leon says, "The terrible things that this mass of migrating people experience en route are neither random nor senseless, but rather part of a strategic federal plan that has rarely been publicly illuminated and exposed for what it is: a killing machine that simultaneously uses and hides behind the viciousness of the… Desert" (p. 3).

In a composite ethnographic vignette (a vignette compiled from the testimony of multiple informants), De Leon (2015) describes in vivid detail the horrific violence that so many experienced while crossing the desert. He describes dehydration, exposure, death, sexual assault and violence by those who take advantage of the vulnerability of migrants in transit. Two of my participants experienced parts of this reality while crossing the US-Mexico border. All three of my participants have different stories of crossing the US-Mexico border. Domingo crossed the *Río Bravo*, and later walked through the desert but was never caught by immigration and ended up at a safe house in Texas before making his way to Washington State. Edgar crossed from Tijuana to San Diego, California where he was promptly detained by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP). Tuto crossed the *Rio Bravo* and the desert and was than detained by CBP. I want

to highlight Tuto's border crossing story because it speaks to the reality both of crossing the desert and of being detained by immigration officials. Out of the three, his is the story that highlights both of these experiences.

Tuto crossed the US-Mexico border in 2013 at the age of 15. After several failed attempts to cross the *Rio Grande*, he succeeded. In the middle of the night, he was brought by his *guia* from the house where he was staying with other migrants from his group to the river and told to get in an inner tube. He described the water as cold and the current as fast, and said, "me dió miedo… No quería ahogarme (I was scared… I didn't want to drown)." He arrived on the other side and describing the jubilation of crossing the US-Mexico border. He said, "llegué! Pisé Estados Unidos creo. Ya estaba en Estados Unidos. Estaba felíz (I arrived! I was standing on the United States I think. I was in the United States. I was happy.)." However, Tuto's jubilation would soon evaporate. After several days staying at strangers' houses, he went on to describe a long and difficult walk through the desert to avoid the checkpoints that are periodically spaced in close proximity to the US-Mexico border. What follows is a lengthy quote from Tuto's interview that describes his experience walking through the desert after having crossed the US-Mexico border:

> Había demasiado calor… Y caminé, caminé. Vi huesos. Veía ropa tirada. Vi envases de agua... Veías demasiadas cosas tiradas allí…. Estuvimos caminando casi todo el día y si me canse… parábamos y seguíamos, parábamos seguíamos… es cuando llegó la migración…todos se fueron dispersando. Un amigo se fue a otro lado, yo me fui a otro lado… Escuchaba las motos los autos, los perros, y fui corriendo… Terminé no sé dónde… No quería irme lejos porque sabía si me perdía no sabía cómo iba a terminar… me metí bajo unos arbustos y me quedé tranquilo a esperar allí por casi dos horas… y luego me fui a buscar y encontré un señor y me

dijo que hay que estar aquí por otras dos horas… ¿Me dijo "tienes agua?" y le dije "sí…" Me dijo, "úsala bien, no la tomas toda…" Luego salimos a buscar a la gente que dispersaba… de los 32 solo encontramos a 5. Y éramos 7… El guía… ni lo podemos encontrar entonces éramos solos en medio del desierto. No sabíamos a donde ir excepto a ir donde sale el sol. Caminamos, caminamos, caminamos y luego la noche se puso y tuvimos que dormir en el desierto. Y escuchabas ruidos de animales y sentías que te iban a comer porque era cerca… te asustaban. Y estuvimos toda la noche despiertos. Llegó el amanecer. Y tuvimos que caminar, caminar hasta que -- no sé cómo -- separamos de los siete que estábamos. Terminamos cuatro yendo para otro lado… Nos fuimos para este lado y quien sabe por dónde se fueron, se perdieron. Era cuestión de 10 minutos. Y ya no nos pudimos encontrar las tres personas… ya quien sabe cómo terminaron.

It was so hot… And I walked and I walked; I saw bones. I saw clothes on the ground. I saw water glasses… I saw lots of things strewn on the ground… we were walking almost all day and I got tired…. We stopped, we continued, we stopped, we continued… That's when immigration arrived… everyone scattered. A friend went one way, I ended up – I don't even know where… I didn't want to go far because I knew that if I got lost, who knows how I would end up… I laid under some shrubs and I stayed still waiting for almost two hours… later, I went to look and I found a *señor* and he told me that we needed to be here for another two hours… He asked me "do you have water?" I told him "yes." He told me, "use it well, don't drink it all…" Later we left to look for the people that had scattered… of the 32, we only found five. There were seven of us… The guide… we couldn't find him so we were alone in the middle of the desert. We didn't know where to go, just to go towards where the sun sets. We walked, walked, and walked and then it was nighttime and we had to sleep in the desert. And you heard animal noises and you felt like they were going to eat you because they were close… They scared you. We spent the whole night awake. The sun rose. And we had to walk, walk more until – I don't know how – the seven of us separated. Four of us ended up going another way… we went one way and who knows where the rest went, they got lost. It was a question of 10 minutes. And we couldn't find the other three… who knows how they ended up.

Tuto's description of crossing the desert was harrowing. He described heat and exhaustion, fear and uncertainty at being caught by US immigration officials; He described hiding for hours at a time, feeling afraid of being attacked by animals, and of

having to carefully ration his supply of water. He also described seeing things left along the trail like bones, clothes and leftover bottles of water. These items are remnants of the millions of other migrants who, like Tuto, traversed the same paths. Where did they end up? Maybe some arrived to their final destinations, others were almost assuredly caught by immigration and deported back to Mexico or to their countries of origin. Still others may never have left the desert. Of the 32 people that started walking through the desert with Tuto, only three arrived with him. He was clear in his interview, "quien sabe como terminaron (who knows how they ended up)," pointing to his uncertainty surrounding what happened to them, but also to the range of possible outcomes. As De Leon (2015) documents, death is an ever-present reality in the desert, a product of the official Prevention Through Deterrence US border policy.

However, even then, Tuto's migration story was not over. After walking another full day through the desert, Tuto described coming to a highway. He said that most cars just kept driving, that nobody stopped to help until finally an elderly man stopped, asked if they were ok, let them make a phone call and gave them six dollars. They walked about five more miles until they came to an area marked with a fence. Desperate, they crossed the fence but were stopped by a man who pulled a gun on them and threatened to shoot if they ran. They waited, exhausted, while the man called immigration officials. Tuto describes this as the lowest point during his journey:

> Fue cuando sentí que falle -- que iba a regresar para atrás. Del gran viaje que hice iba a regresar para atrás. Porque era casi un mes de venir hasta mi pueblo y llegar hasta donde yo estaba… Me puse a pensar demasiado que iba a regresar.

> That was when I felt like I had failed – that I was going to be sent back. After the huge trip that I had made, I was going to be sent back. Because almost a month had passed since I had left my town to where I was… I started to think a lot that I was going to be sent back.

Immigration arrived and detained the four people in Tuto's group. However, he was not deported; instead, he was held in a detention center for unaccompanied immigrant minors. After one month in the detention center, he was given a court date for a preliminary hearing for asylum and sent to live with his mother in Washington state.

Though Edgar and Domingo's stories of crossing the US-Mexico border are different than Tuto's, his story contains elements and similarities to theirs. His story illustrates how the lives of Indigenous migrants, through their experiences of migration and official border policies like Prevention Through Deterrence are reduced to the realm of 'bare life.' In the case of Tuto, the most harrowing part of his migration was not crossing the Rio Grande – the official separation marker between the US and Mexico -- but crossing the U.S. desert in order to avoid checkpoints set up to create a buffer zone between the border and the interior. His experience shows how the 'state of exception' of the border actually extends far north and far south, and how the lives of Indigenous migrants are systematically devalued throughout their migrations.

Arrival and Schooling in Washington State

In the winter of 2018, I received a phone call from Carlos, a man I had previously worked with. His 16-year-old nephew had just arrived in Salem, Washington from San Pedro Soloma, Guatemala, after making the arduous migration north and wanted to enroll in school. The 16-year-old was unaccompanied, meaning he was not in the custody of a

parent or other guardian, and his uncle was acting as his caretaker for the time being. The 16-year-old and his uncle did not know how to enroll in school; as one of the few Spanish speakers and advocates for the Latinx community working in the Salem School District, they contacted me for help with the process.

The next day we walked into Salem High School to enroll him in school. Not only was the youth a recently arrived migrant, he also qualified as an unaccompanied homeless youth, and as such, qualified for special legal protections that allowed him to enroll immediately in school even if he lacked documents that would normally be required for school enrollment. I first had a conversation with the youth. I asked him what his goals were in enrolling in school, if he was interested in learning English, if he wanted to get a high school diploma and if he had to work while he went to school. He told me, *"me quiero graduar de bachiller y quiero asistir a la escuela el día completo* (I want to graduate from high school and I want to go to school full time)." I congratulated him on his goals and told him I wanted to support him in whatever way I could to achieve them; then we went to the school counselor's office to start the enrollment process and build a class schedule for him.

During the meeting, the counselor immediately made other proposals: The youth could go to the alternative high school (which offered a half-day ELL program for students who could not attend a full day of school), or he could go to an English language night program which did not offer high school credits and which had no affiliation with the school district. I voiced concerns about both of those possibilities and told her, "he has a right to be in school full time. He won't be able to accrue high school credits as

quickly in either of the programs you just mentioned." She responded, "our ELL teacher doesn't really feel comfortable differentiating that far down. She doesn't feel comfortable with new arrivals, besides, Guatemalans only want to come to school because the court makes them do it right?"

The counselor's response highlights some of the misperceptions that I frequently saw school staff express regarding Maya immigrant students. In her eyes, Carlos' nephew didn't care about school – so why should she care about his access to education? Her assumptions demonstrated a lack of understanding of the complexity of the obligations that my youth participants maintain in the United States, and an over-simplification of their circumstances, options and relationship to education. More than this, her reaction was based on overly-broad generalizations and assumptions about the aspirations of one student based on misconceptions of Indigenous migrant students from Guatemala as a demographic. In short, her response was profoundly racist, and served to prevent a vulnerable youth who faced tremendous adversity and obstacles from accessing his right to a public education. Her response reified deficit notions of Indigenous Latinx immigrant students as youth with low skills and no knowledge (L. J. Pentón Herrera, 2019; Valencia & Black, 2002). Her reaction failed to acknowledge the knowledge that Indigenous youth learn from their families and communities – knowledge which is important and valuable, but which rarely is valued or acknowledged in US schools.

U.S. schools privilege western knowledge, colonial ways of knowing and the cultural capital of white, affluent students over working class students and students of color (Apple, 2004; Battiste, 2005; Ek, 2009; MacLeod, 2018; Morales et al., 2019;

Rogoff, 2014). The lack of educational attainment attributed to Latinx students, which is often blamed on the cultural and mental deficiencies of Latinx students and their families, is more often rooted in the systemic racism exhibited by educational institutions (Valencia & Black, 2002). Contrary to the deficit views commonly deployed against Indigenous Latinx communities in Latin America – and their diasporic migrant counterparts in the United States – Indigenous Latinx youth possess rich funds of cultural knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2006; Moll et al., 1992; Urrieta, 2013; Yosso, 2005) that often go unappreciated, under-valued and ignored in US schools. In addition, US schools both channel and reproduce neoliberal ideologies by re-inscribing notions of personal responsibility as a way to explain social and racial inequities (De Lissovoy, 2015).

Indigenous youth possess important, unique cosmologies, knowledge and ways of knowing (Battiste, 2005; López & Irizarry, 2019; L. J. Pentón Herrera, 2019; Rogoff, 2014; Simpson, 2017; Urrieta, 2013). Rogoff (2014) outlines an informal way of organizing knowledge which she calls "Learning by Observing and Pitching In" (LOPI) which is common to Indigenous communities in the Americas. She contrasts this Indigenous approach to learning with Western assembly line instruction. With LOPI, leadership is flexible and engagement is collaborative rather than coercive. Children are considered active participants whose contributions are of value to the community. While Western schooling prioritizes the transmission of knowledge and skills, the goal of LOPI is to "transform participation by learning to collaborate with consideration and responsibility" (Rogoff, 2014, p. 74).

While engaged in participant observation in San Pedro Soloma, I had a conversation with Don Fernando, the father of Edgar. He was working and I was accompanying him and helping as much as I could. He was talking to me about how important it was for him that his kids know how to work in the *milpa* (cornfields). Don Fernando had, about six months prior, returned to Guatemala after spending several years in the United States. His time in the U.S. allowed his family to build a house made of solid construction materials, but he lamented not being able to teach his youngest son – who was 15 years old at the time I was there – how to work in *la milpa*. He said to me, "Con Edgar y sus hermanos mayores yo les enseñé a trabajar en la milpa, pero mi hijo menor creció sin mí. Él no sabe trabajar (With Edgar and his older brothers, I taught them to work in the *milpa*, but my youngest son grew up without me. He doesn't know how to work.)" Over the course of my observations with Don Fernando and his family, I saw him work hard to include his youngest son in the tasks of daily life. I saw him take his son up the mountain to look for firewood, teach his son to work in the *milpa,* and take his son to work. His son was also responsible for taking care of the family horse and cow by gathering *zacate* (grass), making sure they had water to drink, cleaning them and taking them out to pasture.

I believe this to be an example of Learning by Observing and Pitching In. In this example, his son was considered an important member of the family whose contributions were vital for the day to day maintenance of their household. He was responsible for performing *critical* tasks that needed to be done for the household to operate. Chopping wood provided a source of firewood without which the family could not cook food, boil

water to make it fit for consumption or heat the house. Maintaining the *milpa* was an important task that provided food for his family to eat. Going to work with his father contributed to his family's income. Fernando's son embraced his role. I understood him to feel a sense of personal value, importance and validation due to his position as a valued, contributing member of his household whose contributions were an important part in the day to day survival of his family.

Urrieta (2013) makes important contributions to a theory of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), referring to complex *saberes* (knowings) that Indigenous communities pass down from generation to generation. *Saberes* "refers to complex "knowings" or "understandings" of the world, tied to *familia* and *comunidad* knowledge(s), but also encompassing larger social, natural, and spiritual well-being (Cajete 1994)" (Urrieta, 2013, p. 320-321). For Urrieta, learning *saberes* in this fashion provides children with opportunities to learn a host of skills. Listing these skills, Urrieta (2013) says:

> From embroidering, for example, girls learned shapes, old and new patterns (grecas), counting, seriating, estimation, and developed dexterity. From agricultural work and animal husbandry children learned about the weather, seasons, soils, grasses, insects, sustainability, and environmental awareness as in other Indigenous contexts (Hunn 2008). Most importantly, they learned the survival ways of their familias and comunidad… Children also learned responsibility through childcare, for example; patience and persistence through embroidering; and ultimately belonging through familia and pariente collaboration.

Urrieta's (2013) and Rogoff's (2014) analyses show that Indigenous communities have complex, highly advanced ways of organizing teaching and knowledge that should be valued, recognized and respected in US schools. Unfortunately, in the anecdote I shared

regarding Carlos' nephew, the knowledge he possessed as a Maya immigrant youth was erased. In making his Indigenous knowledge invisible, the reaction of the school counselor also served to devalue his Indigeneity and hence, him as a person.

This is not to say that U.S. schooling is not important or useful; rather, I am trying to call attention to the ways in which schooling privileges some forms of knowledge while devaluing, and failing to recognize others. Though the curriculum and pedagogy of schools is often considered to be neutral, it is anything but (Apple, 2004; De Lissovoy, 2015; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1993). The knowledge that is privileged in schools is highly racialized, and reflects colonial hierarchies that determine whose knowledge is of value and whose knowledge is devoid of value (Barillas Chón, 2019; López & Irizarry, 2019; L. J. Pentón Herrera, 2019). In addition, schools make assumptions about what it means to be a "student"—i.e., to study full-time and to not let anything else get in the way. Anything that gets in the way of education is seen as a deficit and a symptom of my participants not valuing education rather than an indication of their strong sense of responsibility to their family and community. As I will show, support and encouragement from family members and other Maya community members was critical to their ability to persevere through school despite facing tremendous obstacles and pressures. Far from being a deficit, their connections with their families and communities of origin was an asset without which they would not have finished school. The interviews I conducted with my youth participants also reveal that school staff who supported, pushed, and encouraged them played an important role in their lives.

In interviewing my youth participants, a common theme emerged about their complicated relationships with schooling in the U.S. While all of my youth participants enrolled in school, some more quickly after arriving than others, none of them came to the U.S. with the goal of going to school. My youth participants came with the goal of working to support themselves and their families (Barillas Chón, 2019). In the case of Edgar and Tuto who were both caught and processed by immigration officials after entering the United States, their original motivation for enrolling in school was to satisfy a legal requirement made by immigration on their release. In the case of Domingo, who was never caught by immigration and never faced a legal mandate to enroll in school, he enrolled due to the persistent encouragement of someone he worked with who was also from San Pedro Soloma. Speaking to this experience, Domingo remembered:

> El patrón de mi hermano… yo digo que me calló [sic] bien a él… el me regaló como ropas y zapatos del trabajo. Y unas veces llegamos en la casa de él y me daba de comer… Y pues ellos me apoyaron… empezó a decirme "si vas a la escuela esto puede pasar, puedes tener un mejor futuro, una vida mejor…" Y me brindó el apoyo.
>
> My brother's boss… I would say that he liked me [sic]… he gave me, like clothes and shoes for work. And sometimes we would arrive at his house and he would give me food to eat… and they supported me… He started telling me, "if you go to school, this can happen, you can have a better future, a better life…" and he gave me his support.

Domingo describes his brother's boss as someone influential in pushing him to enroll in school, who was persistent in convincing him that school brought increased opportunities and possibilities for a "better life." After six months of working to pay off the thousands of dollars he owed for the cost of his migration to the United States, Domingo enrolled in school. At first, his goal was not to attain a high school diploma but to gain English

language ability, “mi meta era para dos años estar allí, aprender un poco el idioma, y agarrar mi propio negocio en la yarda. (My goal was to be there for two years, learn a little bit of the language, and build my own landscaping business).”

It is important to remember here the power dynamics inherent in language (Barrillas Chón, 2019; Bitar et al., 2008; England, 2003). As Domingo stated earlier, in the colonial hierarchy (Blackwell et al., 2017) of language in Guatemala, he associated Q’anjob’al as an important component of his Indigeneity, but understood Spanish to be the language of power which had the opportunity to grant access to better, higher paying jobs. The United States employs a similar, but different language hierarchy. Barrillas Chon’s (2019) work details how, for Indigenous Maya immigrants in the United States, language equates to power here as well. Though English is ultimately the language of power in the colonial context of the US, among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Latinos, hierarchies of language exist that offer more opportunities and access to mono-lingual Spanish speakers and less access and opportunity to Indigenous people who do not speak Spanish or who may speak Spanish as a second language or with a certain type of accent (Barillas Chón, 2019). In Domingo’s case, his desire to learn English was also a desire to gain access and opportunity usually denied to Indigenous people both in Guatemala and in the United States.

After eight months in school where Domingo spent most of his time in an ELL, English language acquisition classroom, he reported feeling like he hit a wall:

> Me acuerdo de ser desesperado… cuando vengo en casa… me preguntaba, “que fui a aprender hoy?” Y parecí que no había nada y yo dije tengo que

> escoger porque… no estoy aprendiendo nada. Y estaría… agarrando dinero en vez de ir a la escuela.
>
> I remember being desperate… when I came home… I would ask myself "What did I learn today?" And it seemed like there was nothing and I said I have to choose because… I'm not learning anything. And I could be… earning money instead of going to school.

It was the support of Domingo's girlfriend, who was white and a native English speaker, who helped him get past this wall. He describes her as tutoring him on a regular basis and helping him to learn English. Domingo also received the support of his teachers and school administration. He described teachers who supported him by giving him school supplies and being kind and gentle with him. He also described teachers who went out of their way to give him opportunities to earn credit and a principal who was willing to make an exception to the rules so that he could stay in school even after he turned 21 until he met the requirements for graduation.

In addition, Domingo was invited to be part of his school's honor society. Speaking to this, Domingo said: "yo fui uno de los estudiantes que agarré el 'honors society,'… ellos [mis maestros] se sintieron muy orgulloso de mi porque yo lo logre eso, y no todos los… norteamericanos logran eso (I was one of the students that got to be part of honors society… they [my teachers] felt proud of me, because I achieved that, and not everyone from the U.S. achieves that)." For Domingo, being invited to participate in honors society made him feel like his teachers valued his hard work, efforts, intelligence and ability. He pointed out that not everyone from the U.S. earns that recognition.

Importantly, Domingo also said that he talked to his teachers about his own experiences and parts of his story, and he felt like his teachers respected him and

understood him more after. Speaking to this, Domingo recounted, "ellos [mis maestros] se sintieron agradecidos para escuchar de mi experiencia… también gane el respeto de ellos (they [my teachers] felt thankful to be able to list to my experience… I also gained their respect)." This is critical. Domingo felt enough trust in his teachers to be able to tell them about his experiences. After doing so, he felt like they gave him respect, and this was something that he valued and appreciated.

By highlighting these aspects of Domingo's story through schooling, I mean to draw attention to the possibilities for immigrant Maya students when their teachers, administrators, and communities' members rally behind them, and offer support. For Domingo, the encouragement of a community member convinced him to enroll in school. When he hit walls that made him feel like he was wasting his time, the support of his girlfriend and other community members helped him through it. And throughout his school experiences, his teachers and administration at the highest levels, offered him academic opportunities, support, encouragement, help with school supplies, and recognition for his abilities and respect. He emphasized that feeling respected by his teachers made him feel welcome and supported in school. And the opportunity to participate in honors society made him feel like his skills, work and intelligence was valued and acknowledged. These were critical components of his experience with schooling that contributed to his success, and point to strategies that schools and teachers can use to support other Maya immigrant youth.

Upon arriving in Washington State, Tuto went to live with his mother. He had not seen her since he was a small child. He was legally mandated to enroll in school, but he

remembered his mother as encouraging him to enroll as well. I remember when Tuto first enrolled in school. It was January of 2014. It was my first year working in the school district. I introduced myself to him and offered to give him a tour of the school. We walked around. I asked him about himself and his goals. He said he wanted to learn English. He seemed eager but also very nervous. Throughout the course of his high school education, Tuto encountered intense obstacles which included financial pressures, moments of despair, moments of insecurity, housing insecurity and intense family conflict. He described many periods where he questioned what he was doing in school, and whether it was worth it to finish.

Describing his thoughts about enrolling in school when he first arrived he said, "antes no me interesó la escuela. Nunca vine a estudiar, vine a trabajar (before school didn't interest me. I never came to study, I came to work)" (Barrillas Chón, 2019). It is important to contextualize his comments. I do not interpret his comments as meaning that he did not value education or think it important. In fact, I don't think his words should be interpreted to even mean that he didn't *want* to go to school. His comments speak to the importance for him of fulfilling his obligations to his family in Guatemala. This was his priority. Yet it was also his family who encouraged and eventually convinced him to enroll in school:

> [Mi mamá] me decía, "quiero que estudies, quiero que seas alguien en la vida, quiero que tengas un mejor trabajo de lo que tienes ahora… si le pones ganas puedes hacer mucho, puedes ir al colegio. Mi mamá me decía, mis tías, mis tíos… y eso se fue metiendo en mi cabeza…
>
> [My mom] said to me, "I want you to study. I want you to be someone, I want you to have a better job than you have now… if you put in the effort,

> you can do so much, you can go to college." My mom told me, my aunts, my uncles too… and that kept getting in my head.

For Tuto, the encouragement of his mother, aunts and uncles was crucial in his rethinking of attending school. Previously, he identified work as the way to gain access and power that has systematically been denied Indigenous people in Guatemala. Through the encouragement of his family members, he began to see education in the same light. His mother framed school as a way in which he could "be someone… have a better job" and "go to college." Through the encouragement of his mother, Tuto began to connect school with the promise of increased access and opportunity. In other words, the decision to attend school was heavily bound with the colonial dynamics that exclude Indigenous people from accessing power in Guatemala (Esquit, 2010).

Describing what school was like for him at first, Tuto said, "Me perdí muchas veces. Tenía miedo cada vez que iba a la escuela. Me daba miedo. Si no les iba a entender. Cada vez que alguien me hablaba me daba miedo porque no le entendía. (I got lost so many times. Every time I would go to school I was afraid. I was scared. Of not understanding them. Each time someone would talk to me I got scared because I didn't understand them)." He described sitting for months in English-speaking classrooms where he understood very little and described feeling dejected and hopeless. Eventually he started adapting. Tuto quickly started to learn English.

Throughout the four years that Tuto spent in high school, his educational journey was filled with ups and downs. In one of the lowest points, at age 16, he dropped out of

school for a period of several months. Speaking to what was going on in his life at that time, he remembered:

> Mi mamá estaba con alguien más. Luego estaba viviendo en una casa con gente desconocida. Y eso no me gustó, era algo como incomodo por mí porque tenían alcohol donde dormía… Gente pasaba a veces donde yo dormía… Y el señor con que ella estaba traía sus amigos… Y luego me desenfoqué, no se -- me perdí. Ya no quería hacer nada. No tenía interés en nada de nada. Iba a la escuela, no entendía, no tenía interés, se me hacía difícil. Mejor me pongo a trabajar no? Si me pongo a trabajar me puedo salir de esto… no me gustó y quise irme de la casa. Pero bueno tuve que quedarme porque no había otro lugar donde ir. Y luego en la escuela dije no… otra vez con esto. Pero no quería ir a la escuela. Quise salirme. Dije, termino este año y me salgo. Y fue así… me perdí por un rato.
>
> My mom was with someone else. Then, we were living in a house with strangers. And I didn't like that. It was uncomfortable for me because they had alcohol where I slept… people passed by sometimes where I was sleeping… and the *señor* that she was with would bring his friends… and then I lost focus – I don't know – I got lost. I didn't want to do anything anymore. I wasn't interested in anything. I went to school, I didn't understand, I wasn't interested, it was difficult for me. Better if I go to work no? If I go to work, I can get out of this… I didn't like it and I wanted to leave the house. But, well, I had to stay because I didn't have anywhere else to go. Then at school I said no… not this again. I didn't want to go to school. I wanted to drop out. I said, I will finish this year and then I'm gone. And that's what happened… I was lost for a while.

Tuto describes the discomfort and lack of safety he felt at his house because of the man his mother was with. He described him as an alcoholic and said that he would bring his friends to the house and drink at all hours of the night including in the space where he slept. Furthermore, this had a serious impact on his ability to be in school. During this period, Tuto lost all interest in school under the crushing necessity to work and get out of the situation he was in. I feel it important to add that while many would cast blame on Tuto's mother – it is also important to consider her limited range of options. At the time,

she did not have a place to live and this was highly connected to race, class and gender. As an undocumented woman, she had extremely limited access to rental housing. The decision to live with this man was born out of necessity to avoid living on the street. Tuto dropped out of school for a period of several months, moved to Alabama to live with an uncle and worked construction. This could easily have been the end of his school career but his grandmother intervened. Tuto remembered a conversation she had with him: "Mi abuela me dijo que yo tenía que estar en la escuela. Me dijo, 'quédate en la escuela.' Porque mi abuela siempre quiso lo mejor para mí. Siempre quiso que… tuviera una educación. Me dijo, 'no importa lo que pasa, quédate.' (My grandma told me that I had to be in school. She told me, 'stay in school.' Because my grandma always wanted the best for me. She told me to… get an education. She told me, 'it doesn't matter what happens, stay there.)'" Tuto's grandmothers' words, along with the encouragement of his coworkers, who were themselves Latinx and never had an opportunity to graduate from high school, were enough to convince him. He re-enrolled in school several months later with renewed determination and focus.

This is a small piece of Tuto's journey through schooling in the United States. Here, he described one of the most difficult moments for himself. He was faced with an impossible situation, to continue attending school at the cost of his own sense of safety and security or to drop out and look for other opportunities. He chose to get out of the situation, and dropped out. Yet, his time away from school lasted several months before his grandmother intervened. She encouraged him to re-enroll in school and re-devote himself to his education, no matter what. For Tuto, his grandmother's encouragement

was a critical motivator in his ability to stay in school. His close relationship with her provided him the support he needed to get through a difficult time and re-focus on school. Far from being a deficit, his connection to his family proved to be an important asset.

Both Tuto and Domingo graduated from high school. Tuto graduated in 2018 after a herculean effort. Domingo also graduated in 2018, with honors. He was the graduation speaker for his class graduation. In the anecdote I mentioned at the beginning of this section, the school counselor employed deficit narratives to devalue the importance of that youth's Indigenous identity, knowledge and family connections. Failing to see the complexities of the obligations that many Maya immigrant youth maintain towards their families; she portrayed the need to work and a commitment to family as a deficit. In her view, the need to work meant that Indigenous youth from Guatemala don't value education and only come to school "because the court makes them do it." In reacting this way, she discounted the important forms of knowledge and ways of organizing knowledge utilized by Indigenous Mayas (L. J. Pentón Herrera, 2019; Rogoff, 2014; Urrieta, 2013). As the experiences of Tuto and Domingo show, their relationships with their families was critical to their ability to remain in school, as was the support and respect of teachers, administration and other school staff. The counselor's reaction ignored the very important role that school staff can play in supporting Indigenous immigrant students to get through school.

Chapter Four: Post-Schooling and Present Day Life

> Mi mama me enseñó como limpiar la milpa… me enseñó a cortar leñas y también no cargar mucho porque todavía cuando no teníamos una mula cargábamos con la espalda… yo digo que las enseñanzas de ella me hacen recordar algunas veces cuando estoy trabajando en la jardinería y el azadón mío… parecía exactamente de lo que usamos en Guatemala. Simplemente es otra más grandecito. Pero eso me trae recuerdos cuando estoy limpiando flores como ella me enseñó hacerlo. Y yo digo que eso es uno de los recuerdos que me hace recordar… Si me acuerdo de ella. Yo digo que me acuerdo de ella todos los días no tanto con lo que ella me enseñó, pero con los recuerdos que nosotros vivimos juntos con ella.
>
> My mom taught me to work in the corn field… she taught me to cut firewood and also not to carry too much because when we didn't have a mule yet we carried firewood on our back… I say that I remember her teachings sometimes when I am working in gardening and my *azadón* looks exactly like the one we used in Guatemala. It's just a little bigger. But that brings up memories when I'm trimming flowers the way she taught me. And I would say I remember her every day, not just with what she taught me, but with the memories that we lived together.
>
> \- Domingo

Domingo spoke about his mother's teachings and how useful and important they were to him. His mother taught him to work – in the milpa, cutting and carrying firewood – but there were also important *saberes* (Urrieta, 2013) embedded in her teachings that could be applied more broadly to aspects of life outside of agricultural work. Domingo's mother taught him the value of hard work, but she also taught him take care of himself by not carrying too much weight. Domingo connected these teachings to his work gardening in the US. For him, gardening makes him remember his mother and the "memories [they] lived together." His work in the US carries more significance to him than simply making money. For him, gardening is a means to maintain a connection to the agricultural, Indigenous traditions of his family and community, and the teachings of his mother. This

chapter will discuss the ways in which my youth participants maintain connections to their families and communities in the context of their lives after exiting from public education, and how these connections form an important component of their Indigenous identities (Alberto, 2017; Batz, 2014; Boj Lopez, 2017; Casanova, 2019; Martínez & Mesinas, 2019; Morales et al., 2019). I will also discuss the institutional obstacles they face and their dreams for the future.

For Alberto's (2017) family, it was very important to speak Zapoteco at home, wear traditional Zapotec shoes and clothes, and to participate in communal *cargos* – communal responsibilities which she describes as "civil service commitments, serving in office, or contributing monetary donations to fulfilling religious commitments, hosting a posada, financing the upkeep of the patron saint statue, or participating in the labor of producing costumes for specific dances and celebrations" (p. 248). Alberto identifies these aspects of her life as important ways that her family maintained their connection to their Indigenous identities and communities of origin while living in diaspora in the United States.

Batz (2014) also talks about Maya immigrant families from Guatemala that live in Los Angeles and the strategies they use to maintain their Indigenous Mayan identities. Batz (2014) advances an important discussion in describing the cultural practices of this community. He describes ways that Indigenous Guatemalan immigrants "recover, preserve, and maintain" (p. 196, 2014) their cultures, languages and identities but also how they "transform, reconstruct, and negotiate" saying that this recognizes "the fact that Maya identity and culture have changed over time and space as a result of colonization,

displacement, and migration" (Batz p. 196, 2014). His contrast between maintenance/ preservation and transformation/negotiation is important because it shows how diasporic Maya immigrants from Guatemala utilize different, seemingly opposing strategies to stay connected with their cultures, languages and communities of origin, and how this forms an important part of their identity formation in the United States (Batz, 2014).

Critical Latinx Indigeneities (Blackwell et al., 2017) provides an important framework for understanding this dichotomy, revealing how identity production happens in different ways as people cross borders. This is a complicated (and creative) process that Indigenous youth continually engage in order to maintain continuity with their place and culture of origin while also adapting to new expectations and demands. All three of the youth participants practiced a range of strategies that both maintained language, relationships and cultural traditions from their communities of origin in Guatemala but also negotiated with the new contexts they encountered in communities in the United States. For Domingo, Tuto and Edgar, this looked different, but their range of differing practices formed a critical component of their own identities as Indigenous immigrant youth living in diaspora in the United States.

Tuto

In the summer of 2019, I first reached out to Tuto to see if he wanted to participate in this study. I invited him out to lunch. Though I had known him for years, I hadn't seen him for about a year, since he graduated from high school, and I left my job at the school district to attend graduate school. We met at a local restaurant. He told me that since graduating high school, he felt lost. Though he had an ongoing court case to

determine if he would receive asylum or not, he had been granted a temporary work visa which allowed him to do work that some of my other participants would not be able to do. He had worked at a local casino but quit because he didn't like how he was treated. Now he was working at night as a security guard for an abandoned factory. Because he worked at night, and slept for most of the day, he said that he rarely interacts or talks with other people. I asked him if he had considered attending college and he told me that he really wanted to, but it was very difficult because his Mother was growing older and he needed to work to support her. He seemed to me to be depressed and struggling because of his perception that his financial obligations limited the possibility of continuing education. He said, "ya ni se lo que hago (I don't even know what I'm doing anymore)."

Tuto told me that he was embroiled in an ongoing legal case, and was facing domestic violence charges. He had recently been arrested, spent a night in jail, and had then been bailed out by his family. He was adamant that his charges were not valid, and that he did not do what he was accused of. I was alarmed and concerned to hear this for multiple reasons. At that point I had known Tuto for 5 years. I knew him to be a kind, gentle, very intelligent and oftentimes mischievous, but harmless young man. I knew he was not a "violent person." However, we live in a patriarchal society that socializes young men to view women as objects, not as people, and that encourages young men to equate masculinity with violence. On the other hand, I was also aware of the ways in which the criminal justice system disproportionately targets working class young men of color like Tuto at every level of the criminal justice process. From initial contacts with law enforcement, to ultimate verdicts, people of color, especially working-class folks of

color are more likely to come into contact with law enforcement, more likely to be arrested, more likely to be found guilty and more likely to receive harsher sentences than their white counterparts (Alexander, 2010). I had seen too many examples of youth that I knew pressured into accepting guilty plea deals with little legal representation, and very little advocacy. The fact that Tuto was young, an immigrant, Indigenous and undocumented made him even more vulnerable and more so a target for the criminal justice system. The consequences for him if he were to accept a plea deal or to be convicted of these charges were dire. Under the Trump administration's guidelines, even being charged with a crime would make him a target for deportation, and would certainly put at risk his ongoing claim for asylum (Shear & Nixon, 2017).

Throughout the time that I engaged in ethnographic work with Tuto, this was hanging over his head. At one point, I had the opportunity to go to an arraignment with him. We arrived at the courthouse where we waited for several hours. In that time, I observed other arraignments. I saw levels of collaboration between the prosecuting attorney and the judge – without the objection of the public defender – that raised serious questions for me about any claim the criminal justice system can make towards impartiality. In one case, a man automatically was assigned an arrest warrant after he violated probation by leaving the state. It turns out he left the state to attend drug rehab in California. When he returned to Washington, he turned himself in and was arrested. The DA also argued that the man be kept in jail and not released. The man's father was in the courtroom. He said he had some information. The judge instructed him to talk to the prosecutor. The prosecutor then used the information to further advocate for keeping his

son in jail. This had never been the father's intention. He said he had an additional piece of information and the judge instructed him to talk to the prosecutor again. This time he insisted on talking with the public defender. It seemed to me that the relationship between the judge and the DA was not that of two independent parties but that of a team who were working together to penalize defendants. I feared what this meant for Tuto, with all of his overlapping vulnerabilities. Eventually it was his turn. Tuto's arraignment lasted about 10 minutes after which he pleaded "not guilty."

In the participant observations I conducted with Tuto, I participated in several activities with him. About once a week, I accompanied him for a large part of his shift at night as he worked as a security guard at an abandoned factory. I would show up at about 7:00 PM, shortly after his shift started. I would often shadow him until about 2-4 AM. The nights I spent shadowing him provided excellent opportunities to have conversations and we often talked about life, family issues, past experiences and relationships. In one particular moment I asked him if he thought of himself as an Indigenous person. He responded, "Nunca había pensado en eso, pero supongo que sí. ¿Es por la familia no? Mis padres son Indígenas, mis abuelos son Indígenas y mis bis-abuelos. ¿Es mantener la tradición verdad? Quizás es por el idioma también (I had never thought about that, but I guess so. It's because of my family, right? My parents are Indigenous, my grandparents are Indigenous and my great grandparents. It's about maintaining a tradition, right? Maybe it's because of the language too)."

For Tuto, Indigeneity is a complex concept that isn't easy to define. Of note, is that he did not previously think of himself as Indigenous. Keme (2018) traces the history

of the term Indigenous as a political characterization that exists in relationship to settler colonialism and in opposition to settlers. It refers to an extremely diverse group of people, all with a plethora of different cultural and linguistic traditions. Many Indigenous peoples have their own ways of self-identifying (Barillas Chón, 2019), whether, as Tuto said, through the maintenance of language traditions, through a connection to home towns and communities, or through connections to cultural traditions passed down from generation to generation. While in San Pedro Soloma, Tuto did not have to think about himself explicitly as Indigenous. In the United States, he no longer had that luxury. The ways in which he was racialized after crossing borders pushed him to think differently about his own racial identity as an Indigenous person (Blackwell et al., 2017).

In highlighting his relationship to his parents, grandparents and past generations, Tuto affirmed that his Indigeneity includes a sense of communalism and connection (Urrieta Jr & Calderón, 2019). This is important in understanding how Maya-Q'anjob'al youth like Tuto maintain their connections with their Indigenous communities of origin, but also how neoliberalism, which seeks to atomize people as separated units disconnected from each other (De Lissovoy, 2015), fails to validate the identities of Indigenous youth like Tuto. This is especially important in the context of schooling, where neoliberalism is frequently expressed through emphases on personal responsibility, and a lack of recognition of people as inter-connected.

After I first approached Tuto to explain to him the research I was engaging in as part of my Master's thesis, he invited me to a *bautismo* for his baby cousin. I was honored to receive this invitation and gratefully accepted. As I sat in Tuto's house where

he lived with his mother, sisters, nieces and nephews and several cousins, other family members started to arrive. They had just come from the local Catholic church, where they had baptized Tuto's baby cousin. As they filed in, I saw women wore traditional *cortes* and *trajes.* Tuto introduced me to each one. He introduced me as a teacher and people welcomed me. The entire event was in Q'anjob'al. Food was served; A big plate of *pepián* was placed in front of me. People who already had food waited for everyone to be served before starting to eat. Then the parents of the baby who was being baptized stood up to say some words. Before starting, the father turned to me and respectfully calling me "maestro" (teacher), apologized to me and told me that he would be speaking in Q'anjob'al. Trying to express gratitude and respect in return, I thanked him and apologized for not speaking Q'anjob'al. Though unfortunately I do not speak Q'anjob'al and did not understand what was said, I heard words in Spanish. On occasion I heard words like "*compadre, comadre, entre familia, compartir, comida,*" and others. I imagined him to be giving thanks for the family and friends that were present and giving thanks for the food and the *bautizo*. Everyone bowed their heads and put their hands in front of them and the family prayed.

Throughout the *bautizo*, I saw many examples of Tuto's family actively working to maintain their cultural and linguistic traditions. Women wore traditional dress. The event was primarily conducted in Q'anjob'al. As I sat in their home and participated, I also observed Tuto interacting with his family members. He spoke entirely in Q'anjob'al. I realized that in six years of knowing him, this was the first time I had ever heard him speak in his family's language. Not once had I heard him speak Q'anjob'al at school.

This observation holds important, but alarming implications and speaks to the ways in which US schools additionally fail to validate, welcome (Barillas-Chón, 2010) and invite important aspects of Indigenous Latinx youths' identities. The *bautizo* served as an important way to create space for Tuto and his family to maintain and reaffirm their Indigeneity in the context of such hostility. It served as a way to bring their family together, creating community bonds around cultural identity production and cultural maintenance. For them, these practices were an important part of navigating being Indigenous, Maya-Q'anjob'al living in diaspora in the United States.

While engaging in participant observation with Tuto and later, with his family in San Pedro Soloma, I learned that he maintains obligations to his family who are still in Guatemala. In particular, there is an expectation that he contribute financially to the wellbeing of his grandparents who raised him and his siblings who are in Guatemala. All of his siblings are women and they are raising children. Many are raising children on their own. While conducting research in Guatemala, I had the opportunity to interview Tuto's grandmother, Maria Jose. We communicated through Tuto's sister who interpreted my questions from Spanish to Q'anjob'al and vice versa. Translating for her grandmother, Tuto's sister said:

> La responsabilidad -- lo que va a hacer el ahorita -- que arregle su casa, junta su dinero para que ayuda mis abuelos pues… el abuelo de él está enfermo y él no está ayudando para su medicina que el ahorita piense en las buenas cosas lo que va a hacer el aquí con sus abuelos. Y lo importante es que el respete el mucho allá y lo que él piensa muy bien que va a hacer con su vida.
>
> His responsibility right now, what he needs to do, is to build his house and save money to help my grandparents… his grandfather is sick and he is

> not helping to pay for his medicine. He needs to think on the good things that he is going to do here with his grandparents. And the important thing is that he is very respectful over there and that he think very carefully about what he is going to do with his life.

His grandmother was clear: Tuto's presence in the United States entailed an obligation to support the family members who raised him and to build a house in San Pedro Soloma. Her expectation was that Tuto maintain a connection to his community and his family even while living in diaspora in the United States. This seemed to me to be a source of tension between Tuto and his grandparents and sisters. From their perspective, he was not fulfilling his obligations. Maria Jose's words: "que el piense en las buenas cosas lo que va a hacer el aquí con sus abuelos (He needs to think on the good things that he is going to do here with his grandparents)," demonstrate her expectation that her grandson dedicate his time to acts that the community considers to be good and positive.

When I returned from conducting field work in Tuto's *aldea* near San Pedro Soloma, I met with him to talk about what I had experienced with his family and in his community. We went out to lunch. I told him about his sisters, grandparents, cousins and other family members. I told him about the *milpas,* how tall the *elote* was, the family's caballo and burro, and about meeting his great aunt. I showed him pictures and several videos of his grandparents, sisters, aunts and cousins sending recorded messages to him and his family in the US. On seeing the pictures and videos and upon hearing my stories, he became very quiet. He started to talk about his own memories saying things like, "I remember playing soccer on that mountain," and "I used to go up there to look for firewood." He exclaimed about the new and well-built new houses that were under

construction, a result of a large percentage of the community having migrated to the United States to work and send back remittances. He became nostalgic, but I also sensed bitterness and perhaps even envy that I could travel so freely and that he could not due to his undocumented status. He exclaimed, "No sé qué estoy haciendo aquí. Voy a regresar allá. Vas a ver, entre unos años. Voy a trabajar para hacer una casa y voy a regresar (I don't know what I'm doing here. I'm going to go back there. You will see; in a few years. I'm going to work to build a house and I am going to return)." This was a radical change from the way I heard him talk about his future plans before I left. And though his situation had become much more difficult, I also believe that seeing pictures and video of his grandparents, and seeing pictures of the mountains where he grew up evoked a sense of loss and pain for him. I imagined his pain was about the reality of living in diaspora; of needing to be in the U.S. (with all the sacrifices this entails) but desperately missing the mountains, environment, culture, and community where he grew up. Of feeling othered in the U.S. as a young Maya-Q'anjob'al immigrant, but feeling hopeless about the possibilities for economic advancement as an Indigenous person in Guatemala. I sensed that he felt lost, without a sense of direction, and with no easy answers or clear path forward.

As I soon learned, his legal situation had become much more complicated. While I was conducting fieldwork in Guatemala, he had been arrested a second time for violating a court order the judge had implemented as a result of his original domestic violence charge. Any possibility of having the charges dismissed or of being declared innocent had now been made even more difficult due to the compounding factor of his

second arrest and subsequent charges. At the advice of his lawyer, he accepted a plea deal, pleading guilty to both charges and agreed to serve a jail sentence of around one month with work release, a host of mandated domestic violence and anger management classes, a large amount of court ordered fees and fines, and several years' worth of probation. More significantly, his immigration application requesting asylum would almost certainly be denied, and as an unauthorized immigrant with a criminal record, he was now in serious risk of deportation. He served his jail sentence without issue, but several weeks after his release I received a phone call from him. According to him, the young woman who was the plaintiff in his domestic violence case had been kicked out of her mother's house and needed a place to stay. She asked him if she could stay with him and he agreed, violating a court mandated no-contact order. Shortly after, while he was present, the young woman got into a serious altercation with her mother which included violence and threats of suicide. He intervened to prevent anyone from getting hurt and called the police. The police arrived, not realizing that he was violating a no-contact order, and although they originally congratulated him for helping to de-escalate a violent and dangerous situation, they later called him and told him that he had a warrant out for his arrest and that he needed to turn himself in. He fled the state in hopes that he would have some more time to work, save money and build a house in Guatemala rather than spend additional time in jail or prison, and potentially be subjected to deportation. He currently has an outstanding arrest warrant in the state of Washington. By highlighting this, I do not mean to sensationalize Tuto's story. I do mean to describe the reality of what he is facing. His experience is important because it is representative of how easy it

is for young migrant youth to become entrapped in the criminal justice system, and for youth who have undocumented statuses, the consequences can be dire. This serves as a warning for other migrant youth like Tuto to be extra careful. It also serves as an urgent call to address the ways in which vulnerable youth experience disproportionate outcomes when interacting with the U.S. criminal justice system.

Tuto's story is complex, and though it would be easy to come to quick judgements about his legal troubles and the "choices" he made, it is much more difficult to try to fully understand the complexities of his situation. All too often under neoliberalism, 'personal responsibility' is used as a blanket explanation for social problems which in reality have structural roots. As De Lissovoy (2015) argues, "neoliberalism is characterized by… a reframing of economic stratification and polarization as the effect of individual choices and abilities" (p. 52). He goes on to write, "Neoliberalism's tolerance for racialized differences in opportunity depends on its thoroughgoing commitment to understanding social problems as the effect of individual choices within which racism specifically is seen as an individual rather than a structural problem (Goldberg, 2009)" (De Lissovoy, 2015, p. 54). Explaining Tuto's legal problems and personal challenges as personal moral failures prevents us from seeing how structures like neoliberal capitalism and colonialism impact his life and experiences. These socio-economic structures, and their institutions assign Tuto racialized labels like: immigrant, "criminal," Latinx and "illegal," which influence his treatment at the hands of police, the district attorney's office and the judge. But neo-liberal ideologies occlude this process by

justifying his racialized treatment through the lens of personal responsibility and personal choice.

Edgar

I first met Edgar in the spring of 2017 when he was 17 years old and a newly arrived immigrant to the United States. He was sitting in an ELL classroom in the school I worked at, and when I went to talk to his teacher, I instantly recognized him as the brother of one of my former students. The following fall, he and his 15-year-old brother stopped by my office. They were in a very difficult situation. Their father, Fernando, had recently been arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol and was incarcerated in the county jail. The reason they came to my office, was because they wanted to find a way to visit their father in jail. I recognized the vulnerable situation they were in as unaccompanied youth who were also Indigenous and recent immigrants, and I promised to help.

Edgar and his brother were both under court order to attend school while their asylum cases were pending but when their father was arrested, they lost their main source of protection, guidance and economic support. Although they were initially reluctant to tell me, I learned, after prying a little, that they didn't have food at home. I went to work to make sure that they had their basic needs met, and I also searched for a way they could visit their father. I researched the jail visitation policy, which required visitors to have a state ID and to be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. As undocumented immigrants and now as unaccompanied youth, they had no way to easily meet those requirements. I called the sheriff's office, and I also talked to the sheriff's wife who

worked in the same building as I did. The next day, the sheriff came by to visit his wife, and left me a copy of the jail's visitation policy. The message was clear.

Later, Fernando was released but was quickly arrested again for driving while intoxicated. As Edgar said once while sitting in my office, "Mi papá toma mucho (my Dad drinks a lot)." While he was out of jail, we took advantage of the time to sign an emergency custody agreement, granting custody of the two brothers to their older brother, who at that time was in his early twenties. In the event of Fernando's re-incarceration or in the event of his deportation, we did not want Child Protective Services involved. The second time, Fernando spent several months in jail during which time we were all uncertain whether he would eventually be released on his own recognizance or be released to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Both boys were facing enormous challenges as Indigenous, immigrant youth who were unaccompanied. In particular, they were struggling to stay in school while needing to work to pay for food, rent and other expenses. I promised to find resources to ease their financial obstacles and make it easier for them to stay in school. As youth who were undocumented, the number of state resources available to them were almost non-existent. Fortunately, a community member agreed to support the boys financially, promising to help them with several hundred dollars monthly for rent and food.

After his 18th birthday, Edgar stopped attending high school because of the financial pressures facing him as an unaccompanied youth and because of his financial obligations to his family in Guatemala. A year later, his father Fernando decided to return to Guatemala because of medical issues that prevented him from doing many kinds of

labor in the US, and to be with his wife and three children who were still there. When I interviewed Fernando in Guatemala, he expressed pain and sorrow that he could not be with both his children in the U.S. and his wife and children in Guatemala:

> Como pudiera hacerme en dos para estar la mitad allá y la mitad aquí? Pero no puedo. Siempre me da lástima, me da tristeza oír de mis hijos hasta allá solo, y yo aquí con mi esposa. Y si me voy estando con mis hijos, me pongo triste por mi esposa y mis hijas que están aquí también no? Me da lástima, no puedo hacer nada.
>
> How can I cut myself in two so that I can be half there and half here? But I can't. It hurts me, it makes me sad to hear about my kids over there alone, and I [am] here with my wife. And if I go to be with my kids, I get sad for my wife and kids that are here too. It hurts me. There's nothing I can do.

About 7 months after Fernando left the US to be with his family in Guatemala, I reached out to Edgar with the idea for this project. He was enthusiastic. We had maintained a close relationship after he left school, and he was excited about participating. He seemed particularly excited that I was planning to go to his *aldea* and meet his mother and siblings. We set a day when I could go to work with him and engage in participant observation.

The first day I was scheduled to engage in participant observation at his work, I arrived at Edgar's double wide trailer on a Monday at 6:20 AM. He worked as a landscaper. Though he had a car, and regularly drove to work, I offered to drive because I knew he didn't have a license and risked a $1,100 ticket if he was stopped by the police.

Knowing the risk he took every time he drove to work, he agreed. We drove 40 minutes to a grocery store parking lot where we waited for his boss and coworker to arrive. Several minutes later, they drove up in a well-used pick-up truck with an

assortment of gardening tools, equipment and cut grass in the back. Edgar told me to wait and went to talk to his boss who was also from San Pedro Soloma. As they talked, his boss looked suspiciously over at me, then motioned me to come forward. He asked me if I wanted to come with them and I said yes, then he motioned for me to get in. We left the parking lot, ran some errands like stopping to get gas, and buying pairs of work gloves, then drove up the peninsula to start working. We drove up and down the Puget Sound, visiting different houses and businesses.

Throughout the whole day, Edgar's coworker drove. Edgar's boss explained to me that his driver's license was suspended because he had been caught driving drunk. He said that he was "*enfermo* (sick)" and had a problem with alcohol. After about an hour of driving, we stopped at a house and the crew started unloading equipment. I asked if there was anything I could do to help. Edgar's boss gave me the job of pulling weeds from a gravel area in the customer's yard. I quickly got to work. We trimmed and manicured bushes, and ivy, pulled weeds from the driveway, and thoroughly cleaned the garden areas of the customers' yard, which included pulling out bucketsful of weeds, ivy, raspberry bushes, blackberry bushes and other invasive plants. We cut tree branches, used a propane torch on weeds growing out of the gravel driveway and dug out roots. Though Edgar and his coworkers made it seem easy, for me, as someone who had not worked physically in many years, it was gruelingly hard work.

At different points during the job I talked with members of the crew. Edgar's boss told me that he had been in the U.S. since the early 90's when he was 14 years old. I asked him if his family was here. He told me, "That is a long and complicated story." I

remained silent. Finally, he added that he had lived with his father until he was 14, when his dad, who worked in a meat factory, was killed. He looked sad as he said this and was clearly struggling to not show his emotions as he talked.

I didn't talk with Edgar much throughout the job. He kept asking me if the work was difficult, and I kept responding, "a little." In all honesty, I didn't want to admit how difficult the work was for me. Edgar's movements were skilled and practiced. It was clear that he had been doing this work for a very long time and was very adept at it. He was a full member of the crew, took initiative himself, and did not need to be told to do things. The crew operated as a team and worked together. His boss always worked with them, and very infrequently told him what to do. When he instructed Edgar, it was as a team member, not necessarily as a boss.

Around 1:00 PM we finished the job and packed up the equipment. Then we drove for about 45 minutes to a casino to have lunch. Edgar was not 21 and was not allowed inside, but I went in with Edgar's boss who bought lunch for everyone. As we sat there, he told me that his brother had won $10,000 at this casino, but the casino didn't want to pay him, so they called ICE and then threw him out. He also told me about his struggles with alcoholism. He said that he had been to the hospital once for alcohol poisoning. He was currently seeing an alcohol counselor and was involved in a court case for drunk driving. He added that he drank on Saturday. After he was caught driving drunk and jailed, ICE came to get him. They sent him to the Northwest Detention Center, where he remained for 8 months.

After we finished eating, I brought food to Edgar who was waiting outside. We sat together for an hour and a half to finish waiting for his boss to be ready to leave. I asked Edgar if this was normal, and he answered, "Yes they always do this. We never do much. We work for about three hours and the rest of the time it's driving around, or sitting outside the casino… I don't understand why he wants to waste his money and pay me for waiting for him--but whatever." I asked him if he liked this job and he said he did because his boss treated him well and the pay was a little better than previous jobs he'd had. He told me that in other jobs, his *patrones* (bosses) never provided water or food while he worked. They treated him badly, never gave him breaks, and sometimes refused to pay him at all. Though he said sometimes he got tired of waiting for his boss at the casino, he liked this job because this *patron* was respectful, always paid him and treated him well. Sometimes, he told me, his boss would pay him to drive, if he was drinking.

As we sat and waited, I suggested maybe we could use the time and call immigration lawyers to help with Edgar's upcoming immigration hearing. I was very nervous because his hearing was in a month and he didn't have a lawyer. He agreed. We called two lawyers and left messages for both, but never received calls back.

Finally, Edgar's boss came out of the casino. He said he had won $130. As we parted ways, he insisted on paying me, and though I expressed reluctance, he handed me $75 and invited me to come back the next day. I thanked him. On the drive back to Edgar's house, we talked a lot, and he invited me to have a smoothie. The following is an excerpt from the conversation we had on the drive back to his house:

S: Como era para ti tenerme alli hoy? Se sentía raro (what was it like for you having me there today? Was it weird)?

E: Pues si era algo extraño porque no te había visto hacer trabajo físico. Tu eres alguien que trabaja en oficina. (Well, yes, it was weird because I had never seen you do physical work. You are someone who works in an office.)

S: Y como era eso para ti? (and what was that like for you?)

E: Sentí triste, pero después me acordé que vas a hacer esto por un rato nada mas (I felt sad, but then I remembered you would be doing this for just a little while).

S: Y porque te sentiste triste (and why did you feel sad)?

E: Me siento triste pensar que otros tienen que hacer este tipo de trabajo. Aveces pienso en los niños que tienen que trabajar así… así como yo. Pienso en los demás que están en situaciones como yo y me siento bien triste. Este trabajo es duro. Hoy no fue tan duro, pero algunos días son muy duros. Y yo se que tengo que hacerlo, no tengo otra opción. Solo espero que mi hijo no tiene que trabajar como yo (It makes me sad to think that other people have to do this kind of work. Sometimes I think about kids who have to work like this… like me. I think about other people in the kinds of situations that I am in and it makes me sad. This work is difficult. Today wasn't so hard, but some days are really hard. And I know that I have to do it, I don't have another choice. I just hope that my child doesn't have to work like me."

S: Claro, creo que todos los papás quieren que sus hijos tengan una vida mejor que la suya, verdad? Si podías hacer cualquier trabajo del mundo, que harías? (Of course, I

think all parents want their children to have better lives than they did right? If you could do any kind of work in the world, what would you do?)

E: Me gustaría ser abogado de migración, para ayudar a la gente, pero eso nunca va a pasar (I'd like to be an immigration lawyer, to help people, but I don't think that's going to happen).

S: Por qué no (Why not)?

E: Yo no creo, Sascha (I don't think so, Sascha).

Edgar talked about how strange it was to see me doing physical work and that he associated me with office work. This is an important observation which reveals how labor is racialized in his eyes (Barillas Chón, 2019). Barillas Chon (2019) illuminates how immigrant Maya youth hold understandings of "asymmetries of power" (p. 22) that exist in relationship to labor and language. As Domingo pointed out in Chapter Two, language (as a proxy for race) determines access to jobs which are seen as more prestigious in Guatemala (Bitar et al., 2008). In this sense, Edgar's feelings of strangeness at seeing me work physically were related to his understandings of my positionality as a white man in a position of privilege and the work that corresponded to my positionality (Barrillas Chón, 2019). On a similar note, when he expressed pessimism at the possibility for him of becoming a lawyer, this was also related to his understanding of the opportunities available to him as an Indigenous Latinx youth living undocumented in the United States.

Soon after I started doing participant observation with Edgar, he, his brothers and their families moved to northern Washington, close to the US-Canadian border, to do agricultural work as migrant farmworkers. Although they originally invited me to

accompany them and stay with them, they did not get as many farmworker housing units as they hoped. The twenty members of their family ended up staying in two units, each with one room and two large bunk beds.

Shortly before I was ready to leave for Guatemala, I accompanied Edgar to one of his immigration hearings. He had an ongoing application for asylum that was initiated when he was first detained after crossing the border. I was very nervous because Edgar had not yet found a lawyer, mostly because he did not have the money to pay for one. The courtroom was difficult to find. In fact, we found the place because a group of protesters were outside the building carrying signs that said "Don't Cage Kids." The courthouse was almost entirely unmarked and was located in a suite in one of the top floors of the building. We went inside and were greeted by Homeland Security agents dressed in uniform, an x-ray machine and a metal detector. We went through the security check and walked into the courtroom which was filled with families waiting their turn to be called. As we sat waiting, I observed people go up one by one. Each time, the judge sounded as if he was reading a script. As Edgar's name was called, he went nervously over to a chair in front of the judge and sat down. The judge barely looked at him. A white woman came over and sat next to Edgar. She was an interpreter and interpreted as closely as possible from English to Spanish everything the judge said. The judge repeated the same script that we had now heard multiple times and the interpreter translated. Through the interpreter, the judge asked if Edgar had a chance to find a lawyer. Edgar said no, the judge set a court date several years out, and dismissed him. At first, Edgar did not understand that he had been dismissed and stayed seated for five more minutes

while the judge moved on. The judge then told him more clearly that he could go and Edgar got up and left.

It was apparent to me that Edgar had understood very little of the whole proceeding. Though Edgar's Spanish is very good, Spanish is not his first language; his first language is Q'anjob'al. But frequently, Indigenous migrants, especially youth, are reluctant to ask for interpretation in their first languages because of the negative treatment of Indigenous people. Edgar's lack of understanding of a proceeding that had the ability to determine decisions that would be extremely consequential for him is indicative of a systemic failure of the legal and immigration systems to adequately provide access to Indigenous Latinx immigrants. As reported in news broadcasts on Democracy Now! and *The New Yorker*, Indigenous immigrants are often deprived of their legal right to receive adequate interpretation services, and this frequently negatively effects their immigration cases (*"A Translation Crisis at the Border,"* 2020; Nolan, 2019).

Throughout my time with Edgar, and with his family in Guatemala, I observed that he maintained frequent and close contact with his parents in Guatemala. They would talk every day, often multiple times a day. Sometimes they called just to say goodnight or to check in. I also learned that despite the distance separating them, Edgar's parents are still very much involved in his life. They offer advice to him, and give or deny permission to participate in activities like going out with friends or going on big trips. Once, when I took Edgar and his brother on a hiking trip, they told me that their parents had given them permission to go.

Shortly after my participant observations concluded with Edgar, he and his young wife had a baby. He continues to work in a variety of seasonal jobs, including landscaping, brush-picking, pine tree planting and agricultural work. He hopes to continue working in order to achieve further housing stability, win his asylum and residency court cases and be able to return to Guatemala to visit his mother whom he has not seen in several years. When I saw Edgar for the first time after returning from conducting participant observation with his family in Guatemala, I showed him a video of a recorded message his family sent to him. It was a very emotionally intense moment for him.

Domingo

When I approached Domingo about the idea of participating in this project, he seemed intrigued by the idea. We met at a small coffee shop. Unlike my other youth participants, Domingo was not someone I previously worked with while a school district employee; I met him through a family member. During that initial meeting, I talked to him about my history working in the local school district and about my program of study at the University of Texas at Austin. He told me about things he wanted to do, like write a biography of his life, interview family members in Guatemala about their experiences and about his goal of becoming a secondary level English Language Learner (ELL) teacher. At the time, he had just finished the first year of his Bachelor of Arts degree. He also had his own landscaping/ gardening business and he and his wife were about to have a baby. I was encouraging, and congratulated him on his aspirations. He agreed to participate and we set a date when I could go to work with him.

Over the next several weeks, I worked with Domingo about one day a week. What follows is an ethnographic vignette from my second week working with Domingo:

I arrived at Domingo's house around 7 AM. We loaded up his tools and equipment and left to start the day. We drove along the Puget Sound until we arrived at Port Orchard. The house was located on a steep slope that overlooked the bay. It was beautiful. It was also cool, misty and barely drizzling. Domingo instructed me on what to do and I started towards the back of the house pulling up weeds. After about half-hour, I started trimming hedges on the side of the house. The hedges took a while. Domingo trimmed the hedges with the trimmer while I raked, gathered the cut hedges off the ground and used the sheers to go over the hedges again. While doing this, we found two birds' nests. Domingo was very concerned about bothering the birds' nests and was careful to avoid destroying them. While we worked, we talked. Domingo said that he was worried about how comfortable I would be in Guatemala.

After working on the hedges, we moved to the back of the house again. The back of the house was covered in blackberry bushes and thick, thick ivy. Domingo cut about three feet into the ivy and started cutting with the trimmer. He instructed me to grab a pitch fork, stab the ivy and then pull back so he could see what he was doing. As he cut, I pulled up the ivy and blackberry bushes; then I used the pick to break up the remaining roots that were stuck in the ground. By the time we were done, the ground was left smooth, even and unbroken by roots, ivy, blackberry bushes or ivy.

After lunch, we went to the other side of the house. By this time, I felt exhausted, even though the day was only half done. I pulled up grass and weeds; I also uprooted ivy

and blackberry bushes. Because I was unaccustomed to working physically, it felt like backbreaking work, but Domingo made it seem easy; he was practiced at it, and clearly a very hard worker. Domingo had also brought a friend to help and one thing I noticed was the solidarity between the two. We took breaks at the same time, and if one was still working, the others would continue to work as well. This included breaks for drinking water and eating lunch. During lunchtime, everyone shared their food. There was a sense of solidarity that I had not seen in other worksites. Around 5:00 we finished. I was exhausted. We packed up the tools, Domingo used a blower to clean off the driveway and our workspaces and we left.

This vignette is a brief example of the kind of work Domingo does. But as his quote from the beginning of the chapter mentions, working with the earth and with plants is more than a means to support himself and his family economically, it also represents a way for him to remember the teachings of his mother.

> Las enseñanzas de ella me hacen recordar algunas veces cuando estoy trabajando en la jardinería y el azadón mío… parecía exactamente de lo que usamos en Guatemala. Simplemente es otra más grandecito. Pero eso me trae recuerdos cuando estoy limpiando flores como ella me enseñó hacerlo.
>
> I remember her teachings sometimes when I am working in gardening and my *azadón* looks exactly like the one we used in Guatemala. It's just a little bigger… When I'm trimming flowers the way she taught me… that brings up memories.

Domingo's work is an important way that he maintains a connection to his Indigeneity and to the Indigenous teachings of his mother. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, his mother's teachings hold *saberes* (Urrieta, 2013) like the importance of hard

work and of taking care of yourself, *saberes* which are important across many different professions and which hold uses and applications in many aspects of life beyond the realm of work.

Domingo and his wife invited me over for dinner several times. Though his wife is white, I saw her make tremendous effort to try and adopt aspects of Domingo's cultural heritage that were important to him. She would frequently make hand-made tortillas and hand-made salsas, for example. When I returned from Guatemala, I was asked to bring a traditional *traje* from Domingo's *aldea* for her to wear. I believe this was significant for him, because seeing her wear the clothing that Maya women wear makes him feel like his culture is valued and cherished.

Church forms an important part in Domingo's life. In Guatemala, Domingo was very involved in his community's church and went to church every day. He had a close relationship with the community's pastor and he participated in a youth group. Though I never had the opportunity to go to church with Domingo and his family in the United States, he talked about the importance of his faith during our interview. In particular, he talked about how his faith gave him strength during his migration to the United States:

> He orado a Dios que me sacara adelante a venir a Estados Unidos, venir a luchar una vida -- y yo siempre pedía a Dios… Yo digo que Dios para mí, Él es todo, y sin Él, no creo que hay un sentido para mi vivir en el mundo donde estoy. Y Él mostró el milagro de traerme en este lugar.
>
> I have prayed to God so that I would be able to get ahead and come to the United States, to struggle to make a life – and I always asked God for this… I would say that God for me – he is everything, and without him, I don't think that there is a reason for me to live in this world. He made possible the miracle of bringing me to this place.

Domingo credited God with making it possible for him to survive the migration through Mexico and his eventual arrival in the United States. Since arriving in the US, Domingo has continued to attend church. For him, church provides a supportive community, but it also provides an avenue to stay connected with other Indigenous Maya-Q'anjob'al living in his town in the US. Attending church and maintaining his faith provide a sense of continuity for his own identity as an Indigenous person and a way of connecting his life in Guatemala and his life in the United States.

Domingo also maintained connections to his community in Guatemala. Frequently when I was with him, he would talk with his mother, father or other family members over the phone. He frequently talked to his pastor. He regularly sent money to his family and to help with the construction of the church in his *aldea* (Alberto, 2017) – which has been a community project for over 10 years. During Christmas in 2019, Domingo organized a fundraiser to purchase toys and schools supplies for the children of his *aldea.* He paid his father in small installments to build a house for him and his wife. Though Domingo continued to build a life for himself in the United States-- including pursuing a college education, paying attorneys to attain authorized immigration status, building a business and attending church, he also maintained connections and obligations to his family, community and church in Guatemala. Domingo actively maintained his connections and obligations to his family and community but he also was actively involved in creating a new life, with new relationships and new opportunities for himself in the US. As he built a life for himself in the US, he maintained connections in Guatemala, not undoing himself or erasing important parts of his identity, but growing in

the process. Domingo continues to attend school and to work. In the fall of 2019, his first child was born.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Summary and Recommendations

As I have shown in this thesis, Maya immigrant youth must navigate shifting social, political and economic terrains impacted by settler colonialism and neoliberal capitalism. Though these terrains look different in Guatemala and in the United States, they both impact the opportunities these youth have access to, the jobs available to them (Barrillas Chón, 2019), their treatment in schools in the United States and their treatment in the US criminal justice system. As Indigenous Latinx youth encounter these terrains, they maintain, alter and/ or transform their Indigeneity (Batz, 2014; Blackwell et al., 2017). They also carry important forms of Indigenous knowledge (Rogoff, 2014; Simpson, 2017), gained from "*familia*" and "*comunidad*" (Urrieta, 2013) that are rarely recognized in US schools (López & Irizarry, 2019; L. J. Pentón Herrera, 2019), but which are critical in helping them survive during their migrations and once in the United States.

In chapter two, I show how *aldeas* surrounding San Pedro Soloma where Tuto, Domingo and Edgar are from are under constant attack from multi-national corporations and state efforts seeking to steal and exploit their land, and how this is a continuation of settler colonial and neoliberal policies (Batz, 2017; Speed, 2017; Wolfe, 2006). I show how the conditions of poverty and violence experienced by the communities where the youth are from are caused by different colonial invasions (Batz, 2017) and how these conditions push youth to migrate. I also highlight the importance of education and of organizing for the community as a form of self-defense in the face of the onslaughts they face (Batz, 2018).

In chapter three, I explore how youth experience Indigeneity during their migrations through Mexico and while crossing the US-Mexico border. Borrowing from De Leon's (2015) use of Agamben (1998), I theorize that my youth participant's lives are reduced to 'bare life' through a state of exception throughout their migrations and even after crossing the US-Mexico border. In this chapter, I demonstrate how schools employ deficit narratives about Indigenous Latinx immigrant students (Valencia & Black, 2002) and neoliberal narratives of personhood (De Lissovoy, 2015) to overlook the complex obligations and connections that my youth participants maintain towards their families and communities. I also demonstrate how those connections are important to their senses of self, identities and in their ability to finish school (Alberto, 2017; Casanova, 2019; Esquit, 2010; Falbo & De Baessa, 2006; Martínez & Mesinas, 2019; Morales et al., 2019; Vásquez, 2019). I discuss how US schools, and the people who work in them, have the capacity to do great harm, but also have the capacity to provide life-altering support to Maya immigrant students.

In chapter four, I discuss the lives of Tuto, Domingo and Edgar after exiting from public education. I speak to the strategies they use to both maintain and preserve their Indigeneity but also to transform and negotiate to adapt to new expectations and demands in the United States (Alberto, 2017; Batz, 2014). Though this oftentimes looked different from person to person, their range of strategies formed an important part of their own identities as Indigenous youth living in diaspora in the United States. I explore the work they do, the dreams and aspirations they hold, and the obstacles they face.

It is my hope that this thesis serves as a starting place for school staff in Mason County or any county in the US with Indigenous refugees and asylum seekers to raise important questions about how to make US schools truly welcoming places for Maya immigrant students. This includes thinking about how systems of neoliberal capitalism and settler colonialism are reflected in curriculums, pedagogies and the labels we assign students in school (Apple, 2004; De Lissovoy, 2015; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). Tuto's uncle, Edgar and Domingo all had suggestions for school staff working with Maya immigrant youth. As Domingo said:

> El consejo que les daría [a los maestros] es de ser paciente con [los muchachos de Guatemala] y entender el perspectivo de dónde vienen… no solo es que saben dos idiomas… algunos saben más. Entonces eso deberían de reconocer que eso llega mucho para lograr eso y también yo digo que quizás ayudar a ellos como dar tareas o apoyarles que todo se puede lograr.
> The advice I would give [to teachers] is to be patient with [kids from Guatemala] and understand the perspective they're coming from… it's not only that they know two languages, some know more. So they should recognize that it takes a lot to get far and also, they should help them with homework or support them in achieving anything they want to.

For Domingo, it was important for teachers to be patient and to understand that Indigenous youth from Guatemala often speak multiple languages, and that Spanish is rarely their first language. Edgar echoed similar sentiments talking about how he thought teachers could help Maya immigrant students:

> Pues que ayuden a los que necesitan estudiar. A los que están más necesitados. Que los ayuden, que les dediquen su tiempo a ellos. Se que no les deben nada, pero es una ayuda que le darían y a lo mejor los estudiantes que no saben hablar inglés algún día lo sabrán.
>
> They could help those who need to be in school. Those who need the most help. Help them, dedicate their time to them. I know [school staff] don't

> owe them anything, but it's a support that they would give them and possibly, the students that didn't know how to speak English someday will learn.

Tuto's uncle Jesus, as someone who was lived in Guatemala but had spent time in the US and who had a son that recently went through public schools in the US had lots of thoughts. For Jesus, it was important that school staff know about the realities that Maya immigrant youth face in their *aldeas,* the reasons that youth are forced to leave for the United States and about their experiences in the U.S. He also felt it was important that schools offer opportunities for Maya youth to stay connected to their cultures and languages. In Jesus' words:

> Lo que hace falta allí una materia de la cultura… es mi idea. Entonces por ejemplo que hoy vamos a estudiar de dónde vienes y tu familia. Y así poco a poco, uno va apoyando los jóvenes…. Por medio del estudio pueden tener comunicación con su raza, con su futuro. Así pienso yo, porque es muy importante saber todo… Yo creo que esa parte cabe también en el estudio.

> What is needed, is a class on culture… that's my idea. So, for example, today we are going to study where you come from and your family. And little by little, you could support the youth… Through schooling, they can have communication with their *raza* (community), with their future. That's what I think, because all of that is very important to know… I think that also is part of education.

Jesus' suggestion for schools to take up the challenge of supporting youth to stay connected with their cultures is important and rejects dominant notions of assimilation which reward youth for mono-lingual abilities in English and for competencies exclusively in western knowledge.

It is important for me to highlight the suggestions my participants made to improve schools because they hold expertise in their own experiences. I also want to

highlight the suggestions that other Latinx scholars, particularly Indigenous Latinx scholars, have made to improve U.S. schools for Indigenous Latinx immigrant youth.

López and Irizarry (2019) call for schools to prioritize hiring people who speak Indigenous Latin American languages. In addition, they call for recognition of the cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that Indigenous Latinx students have. To support Indigenous Latinx students who are also SLIFE, Pentón Herrera (2019) calls for small and supportive classrooms so that teachers can differentiate instruction and calls for teachers who are equipped with literacy skills to teach Indigenous Latinx students who are also SLIFE. Above all, he calls for asset based pedagogies like culturally sustaining pedagogy (Kidwell & Pentón Herrera, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995) which value and appreciate the knowledge, intelligence, languages, cultures and identities that Indigenous migrant Latinx students possess. Urrieta (2013) advocates for educators to value the Indigenous knowledge systems common in many Indigenous Latinx communities. He urges educators to recognize and value "the richness of the educational experience in everyday *familia* and *comunidad* life, including students' strengths and capacities as mature persons capable of taking initiative in their own learning" (p. 332). Barrillas Chón (2019) encourages schools and staff to educate themselves about the dynamics of power embedded in language. He urges schools to recognize that Indigenous languages are subordinated. The implications for this, he says, is that it is important for Indigenous migrant youth to learn English, the language of power in the U.S. but it is equally important for youth to maintain ability with their Indigenous languages and feel that they have safe and welcoming spaces in U.S. schools where they can use them without repercussions.

These suggestions are all important and need to be listened to. It is also my view, that we as educators and school staff need to have fundamental conversations about the

ways in which education is structured and how curriculums, pedagogies and common school practices are complicit with, and reproduce settler colonial and capitalist logics (Apple, 2004; De Lissovoy, 2015; Freire, 1993; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). In this conversation, we need to be willing to question some of our fundamental assumptions about the world. Whose knowledge, language, cultural capital and way of knowing is valued in classrooms and whose is not? Who does this benefit and who is impacted negatively? And how does this continue to push assimilationist and deficit views of Indigenous migrant Latinx youth? These questions are partially philosophical, but our philosophies and understandings of the world impact in very concrete ways, the spaces we build and re-build with our daily practices. We need to recognize schools as political and contested spaces, and we need to recognize that we as school staff are political actors with the ability to either maintain the status quo of power relations, to try and build something altogether different, or sometimes to do a combination of both. We also need to realize that students are political actors as well.

Many are doing this work. They are building alternatives to the school-to-prison pipeline, creating democratic spaces where learning is co-constructed between "student" and "teacher," (Souto-Manning, 2009, 2010) and blurring the separation between the two roles. Some are employing critical and decolonizing pedagogies and curriculums (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Grande, 2015) or utilizing culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies (Kidwell & Pentón Herrera, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Others are building school community partnerships that welcome people from marginalized communities and the subordinated knowledges, experiences and languages they possess (Zeichner et al., 2017). While some of this work can be individual (i.e. how can I educate myself and my community) much of it is collective (i.e. organizing with others to create systemic change). It is critical that we realize that when we organize together, teachers,

other school staff and students possess immense power, and the ability to demand the changes that we know are necessary for the wellbeing of the communities we are connected to.

Implications for Education

This thesis differed from most other educational studies in that it did not primarily focus on ethnographic observations of youth in classrooms. Instead, like Barillas Chón (2019), I attempt to paint a portrait of the lives of Maya-Q'anjob'al youth *outside* of school by exploring various aspects of their lives in Guatemala, during their migrations and in the U.S., and attempting to explain the relevance of these aspects of their lives to their relationships with schooling in the United States. Through this work, it is evident that the concepts of funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2006; Moll et al., 1992), community and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) are not just relevant to small children but to adolescent and young adults as well, especially for adolescent and young adult Indigenous Latinx migrants.

Additionally, my work highlights the roles that teachers, administrators and other school staff can play in the ability of Maya immigrant youth to access public education in the United States. School staff are capable of doing great harm when they ignore the assets of these youth, when they ignore the complex connections they maintain with their families and communities of origin, and when they ignore the unique challenges that Maya immigrant youth face. Conversely, school staff can play essential roles in supporting Maya immigrant youth when they offer support, acknowledgement, academic and social opportunities and respect.

Theoretical Contributions

In this thesis, I build on the concept of *saberes* (Urrieta, 2013). Through my research, it is clear that *saberes* do not just stay within the contexts of family or within

Indigenous heritage communities in Latin America, but travel with Indigenous youth as they migrate. Domingo credited his mother with teaching him how to work physically with the earth. Edgar credited his parents for teaching him respect, and Tuto spoke repeatedly about how important the support and advice his grandmother gave him was for him. These are skills and knowledge that were crucial for their ability to survive in the United States.

These *saberes* form an important parts of youth's own Indigenous identities and help them maintain connections to their communities and families while living in diaspora (Urrieta Jr., 2013, 2016). Even while far away, they work to hold onto these connections. In addition, this aspect of *saberes* is relevant to Critical Latinx Indigeneities by contributing to the conversation of how youth negotiate with shifting terrains of power and how they navigate being Indigenous through these terrains. As my research illuminates, Maya immigrant youth use their family and community *saberes* to navigate being Indigenous and to assist with their survival while migrating and while living in the United States. This thesis also contributes to CLI by showing how Maya immigrant youth themselves refuse narratives of assimilation which attempt to coerce them into abandoning their languages, associations and affiliations with their families and communities in Guatemala.

In addition, this thesis also advances scholarship on the experiences of Maya immigrant youth during their migrations. Using the experiences of my youth participants, I build on De León's (2015) use of Agamben (1998) to show how the lives of Indigenous youth migrants are considered expendable throughout their migrations, and how the concepts of 'state of exception' and 'bare life' are applicable throughout their journeys.

While many associate Indigeneity as a feminine practice, affiliating Maya culture with traditional forms of Maya dress, or food, this thesis illuminates how young Maya men also maintain connections to their Indigeneity albeit in different ways.

Reflections on Methodology

Portraiture offers important ways of telling stories. In engaging in this research, I wanted to tell pieces of my youth participants' stories because stories contain important lessons and knowledge. I was also drawn to portraiture because it does not seek to hide the voice or role of the narrator as many researchers do when they make claims to objectivity. Instead, portraiture emphasizes transparency in how the "the narrator searches for the story, seeks it out, and is central in its creation" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 10). This seemed important to me because throughout my research, I was not simply a 'neutral observer' but a participant and a presence that influenced in big and small ways the lives of the people I spent time with. Another aspect of portraiture which seemed important to me was its insistence that analysis and research be positioned in solidarity with marginalized communities. All of these seem like important aspects of my research that contributed to this thesis. However, I believe that my research would benefit from incorporating activist research methodologies. This is important to me because the stories of my youth participants are not simply narratives to passively absorb, but calls to action. I believe that good stories must lead to responsive action.

Limitations

Though I considered including female migrant youth as participants in this study, I was unable to find any who would be willing to participate. This also reflected my time working in the Shelton School District. Most of the strong relationships I developed with Maya immigrant youth were with young men. It is probable that female migrant youth would have different experiences with Indigeneity while living in diaspora. Additionally,

female migrant youth would almost certainly add gender as an important layer of analysis. This thesis did not analyze gender at length and that is a limitation.

In thinking about the limitations of this study, I must also consider the limitations associated with myself and my own positionality. I conducted research with a community that was not my own. This positioned me as an outsider (Barillas Chón, 2019; Smith, 2013) and limited my own ability to read and understand the experiences of my youth participants. Additionally, I spent a relatively short period of time engaging in ethnographic observations – only about 3-4 months. This study would have benefited from more extensive ethnographic observations.

It's important that I mention that this thesis does not provide a complete or absolute picture of Maya-Q'anjob'al youth's experiences with schooling in the United States. This thesis explores certain aspects of Tuto, Domingo and Edgar's experiences with U.S. education, but that does not mean that every Maya immigrant youth will have the same experience.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research would benefit from a more extensive ethnographic study that encompasses youth's transnational experiences. The study I conducted was done over the course of three months which is a relatively short period of time for an ethnography. In addition, there are aspects of my youth participant's lives that I did not explore as fully as I could. For example: their experiences with housing, their experiences with higher education and even their experiences in classrooms and schools. It would be beneficial for future research to explore all of these elements of Maya youth's experience in more detail. Additionally, this thesis did not explore the voices or experiences of female or LGBTQ Maya immigrant youth. But women and LGBTQ Indigenous migrant populations certainly have important experiences that should be elevated and explored.

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